Dis(associate)

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/13853580.

Rating:
Teen And Up Audiences

Archive Warning:
Graphic Depictions Of Violence

Category:
Gen

Fandom:
僕のヒーローアカデミア | Boku no Hero Academia | My Hero Academia

Relationship:
Midoriya Izuku & Todoroki Shouto, Iida Tenya & Midoriya Izuku, Midoriya Izuku & Yagi Toshinori | All Might, Midoriya Inko & Midoriya Izuku, Kirishima Eijirou & Midoriya Izuku, Midoriya Izuku & Uraraka Ochako, Class 1-A & Midoriya Izuku, No Romantic Relationship(s)

Character:
Midoriya Izuku, Todoroki Shouto, Midoriya Inko, Yagi Toshinori | All Might, Class 1-A (My Hero Academia), Iida Tenya, Uraraka Ochako, Kirishima Eijirou, Shimura Nana, Past Holders of One For All

Additional Tags:
Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Platonic Relationships, Midoriya Izuku Has a Quirk, Dissociation, Ghost Midoriya Izuku, Kinda, Izuku is a Spooky Problem Child, Parental Yagi Toshinori | All Might, Service Dogs, Savage Midoriya Izuku, Izuku still gets One for All, Puns & Word Play, Queerplatonic Tododeku, Don't copy to another site

Language:
English

Series:
Part 1 of Izuku is a Spooky Problem Child

Stats:

Published: 2018-03-03 Completed: 2019-01-04 Words: 283,294
Chapters: 40/40

Dis(associate)

by BeyondTheClouds777

Summary

Izuku has a “dissociation” Quirk that lets his ghost leave his body, and it’s both convenient and inconvenient at the same time. Either way, he's going to do whatever it takes to become a hero.

(Now with a TV Tropes page!)

Notes

So I wrote this in present-tense which I usually don’t do, but it seemed fun so why not? :P Gotta try something new every now and then, the same old thing gets boring pretty quick. Anyway, enjoy! :)

See the end of the work for more notes

Waving Through a Window

Chapter Summary

"Waving Through a Window" from Dear Evan Hansen

“On the outside, always looking in,
Will I ever be more than I’ve always been,
‘Cause I’m tap, tap, tappin’ on the glass.
Waving through a window.
Can anybody see?
Is anybody waving back at me?”

The first time it happens, he’s four years old and he almost gives his poor mother a heart attack.

His mom unlocks the apartment door and Izuku sprints inside, skipping and bouncing and beaming from ear to ear. They’re just arriving home from a visit to the hospital, a few weeks since Izuku’s fourth birthday.

“I knew it!” Izuku says brightly, punching both fists into the air. “I knew I had a Quirk! I knew I did!”

His mom smiles right along with him, pulling the door shut behind her. “I’m so happy for you, Izuku!” she says, beaming. “I wonder what your Quirk will be…?”

“I hope it’s something heroic!” Izuku proclaims ecstatically. He’s always dreamed of the day he finally got his Quirk, and he has a few ideas in mind of what he wants it to be. “I want to be able to save people--!”

It happens at that moment--Izuku feels this odd, pulling sensation in his chest, and then suddenly, he’s in the air. His feet don’t touch the ground, and he feels...weird. Like he’s missing something.

There’s a *thud* from below, and Izuku looks down. He sees himself crumpled on the floor, lifeless and still.

He blinks.

“Izuku!?” his mom shrieks, her eyes going wide with fear.

He blinks again for lack of better thing to do.

What just happened...?

His mother *screams* and rushes towards his body--a body Izuku isn't currently... *in?* It doesn't make sense, but it seems right in his mind, for some reason.

"Nonono, I'm okay, Mom!" Izuku exclaims, hoping she can hear him--she does, and her head snaps up, her arms cradling his lifeless body. It's weird to look at.

His mother stares at him. Or, rather, through him, he guesses. It doesn't seem like she can actually see him.

"Izuku?" she calls, voice laced with horror, but also relief. "Are you okay? Where are you?"

"I'm right here!" Izuku calls back, beaming even brighter. He looks down at himself, curious; he can see the floor through his hands, and he's wearing the same clothes as his physical body. He's completely transparent.

"Mom, MomMomMomMomMom, I think this is my Quirk!" Izuku exclaims, head snapping up and smile getting wider. "I can leave my body!"

He says it like it's a good thing, but his mother just seems vaguely terrified.

"I-Izuku, c-can...can you...come *back?"* she asks, her voice trembling, and Izuku realizes that, oh, he should probably check that. As much fun as it is to just float without a care in the world, it'd be unfortunate if he can't actually return to his body.

"Oh!" he says, and he shuts his eyes for a moment, concentrating. He feels the tug again, and this time, he's physically yanked; when he opens his eyes, he's back in his body, in his mom's arms, and she's staring down at him.

"Izuku!" she cries, hugging him tightly. "What--!"

He squirms, and she lets him go, though reluctantly. "I found it!" he says excitedly, and his mother continues to stare at him. "I found my Quirk! Waitwaitwait, lemme see if I can do it again--!"

"I-Izuku--!"

His body hits the floor as his spirit takes air.

“Izuku!”

By the time he’s seven, he’s learned to control it.

For the most part.

There are a few times he slips up by accident--he stops paying attention to the teacher during class and his spirit subconsciously zips out of his body, just like that. On one occasion, a paramedic actually showed up at the school because the teacher freaked and called an ambulance.

It wasn’t until his mother explained it to the teachers that, “Yes, yes, I know it’s strange, but this is actually his Quirk, it’s odd I know but, he’s fine,” that they finally calmed down.

And now Izuku does it for fun.

He’s still practicing, still trying to get the hang of it, because if he wants to become a hero he’s going to have to figure out how the *dang Quirk works--*

“MOM! MOM LOOK!”

His mother turns. And then, she jumps. Izuku is holding a book--the first time he’s ever picked something up as a ghost.

“MOM LOOK I FIGURED OUT HOW TO PICK STUFF UP!” he cheers--to his mother, of course, it looks simply like there’s a book floating by her face, but she knows it’s him so it’s fine. Izuku is too excited to care how it looks right now. “AND NOOOOWWW…”

Izuku concentrates. The book falls through his hands and hits the floor below.

“...IT’S GONE!” Izuku finishes, and he beams.

His mother blinks, then smiles.

“I’m happy you’re learning to control it, Izuku,” she says, like she always does when he improves. “Just, please...warn me next time when you’re not actually... *in your body,* okay, sweetheart?”

“Okay!” Izuku chirps, and he floats off to find his body. He can’t quite

remember where he left it.

When he returns to his body, the first thing he does is race to the bathroom and throw up.

Seems he can't hold onto things for very long without some kind of real, physical backlash.

Izuku hates junior high, really, truly hates it, and it's not because he hates learning.

It's because Kacchan is there, and Kacchan hurts. Hurts *him.*

"You think you can be a hero with some useless Quirk like that!?" Kacchan snarls at him, so close to his face that Izuku can feel his spit on his cheeks. His hands are on Izuku's shoulders, slamming him against the school locker, and his nails dig into Izuku's skin, and it hurts, it hurts, it hurts so *badly*--

Izuku shuts his eyes tightly. And then the pain stops, and he's floating above his limp body. His body crumples to the floor, sliding out of Kacchan's grip, and Kacchan shrieks and stumbles back. He knows about Izuku's Quirk, he just..never expects it.

Kacchan growls, hands trembling at his sides. *"Deku!"* he screeches, and Izuku swallows back sobs, cupping his hands around his mouth. Kacchan can't hurt him when he's a ghost, but that doesn't mean he isn't scared. *"Get back here! Is this the kind of person you wanna be, huh!? Just some worthless coward!?"*

No, Izuku thinks, staring at the floor through his translucent shoes, *it isn't. But I don't want to hurt anymore.*

He waits for Kacchan to finally leave before slipping back into his body. He has a new bruise on his head from smacking the floor, and his shoulders ache and burn, but at least Kacchan is gone.

His mother's gotten used to him coming home with bruises. His Quirk isn't exactly the safest to use--unless he's on a bed or couch when he activates it, he always ends up with new bruises (or scratches, depending on where and how hard he falls).

But not burns. Never burns.

He steps into the apartment, closes the door behind him, and

immediately pulls his sleeve further down so it covers his wrist.

“Welcome home, Izuku!” his mother calls from further inside the apartment--she knows it’s him, he’s the only one other than her who has a key. Izuku hears water running at the sink; the water cuts, and footsteps replace it.

A part of Izuku wants to run, to zip out of his body and dart up his room.

He doesn’t.

And even if he did, it’d be counterproductive; Mom would find his body anyway, find the burns and bruises that for once weren’t caused by his own Quirk, and she’d eventually find Izuku--his ghost--no matter how silent he was. He’d never been very good at hiding from her. Maybe it’s a mother thing.

She turns the corner, smiling--and then, when she catches sight of his face, the smile melts into horror. She races towards him, and he turns his head so he doesn’t have to meet her eyes.

She takes his hands in hers, and he winces when her fingertips brush the burns. Burns that weren’t there when he left for school this morning. Burns Kacchan gave him.

“Izuku, what happened?” Mom asks, voice soaked with fear. He doesn’t answer, and she cups his face in her hands and turns his head so he looks at her. She inhales sharply, one hand brushing his hair off his forehead, where the biggest bruise is.

“What happened?” She’s more urgent this time, holding his gaze even as he fights to look away. “Izuku, *tell me what hap*-- Izuku!”

He can’t help it. A tug pulls his ghost away, and his mother catches his body before it hits the floor.

“Izuku!” his mother snaps, hooking her arms beneath his to keep his limp body from hitting the ground. She’s angry now, but Izuku knows it’s just because she’s worried. “If you don’t *tell me what happened--!”*

“I-I’m sorry!” Izuku’s voice is more shrill than he means it to be, and he slips back into his body immediately. The pain returns, spiking through his wrists and shoulders and head, and he winces. His mother releases him, but keeps her hands on his shoulders, just in case.

“I-I didn’t mean to do that,” Izuku pants. He feels oddly out of breath, but he doesn’t know why. “S-Sometimes w-when…w-when I’m overwhelmed I just…” He swishes a hand through the air, voice shaking as he tries not to cry. “Y-Y’know, *zoom.”*

He tries to make light of it, he really does.

His mother isn’t having it.

“That bruise on your head,” she says, moving his hair out of the way again. Her fingers ghost over the bruise (heh, *ghost),* and he winces, dull pain shooting through it. “You dissociated again.”

That’s what they call it: dissociation. To Izuku’s knowledge, there isn’t another Quirk quite like his in existence, so they gave it its own name. Dissociation. That’s his Quirk. Convenient *sometimes,* but mostly just annoying.

Izuku sucks in a sharp breath. His eyes burn with tears, but he nods.

“Why?” his mother asks, desperate now. “I-I understand *that* bruise, but...I-Izuku…”

That’s the problem. He has *tons* of bruises, and only a handful of them are because of his Quirk.

Not to mention the *burns…*

“Izuku...Izuku, *why?”*

He chokes on a sob and shakes his head feverishly, bringing his hands towards his face and rubbing his eyes with his knuckles. His mother’s hands slide from his shoulders to his back, and she hugs him tightly. A second later, he hugs her back.

His physical body hurts, and he wants to abandon it again just so he doesn’t feel its pain.

But he can’t feel his mother’s hugs in his other form, so he stays this way for now.

The next morning, Izuku tells her exactly what happened. He doesn’t want to, but he trusts her more than he trusts anybody else. He knows that she loves him and that she’d want to know if he’s being bullied--which he is.

He tells her about Kacchan. She listens, nodding periodically, until he

finally finishes his story and falls silent.

After that, she rises to her feet and picks up her phone. She calls Kacchan's mother first, then the school.

Izuku transfers to a different school a week later. No more Kacchan.

When he's fourteen, he's attacked by a villain.

A villain with a body made of slime and...and...well Izuku doesn't know *what else,* but it smells rancid and rotten and Izuku tries to run, but he isn't fast enough. The monster grabs him, restrains him, *chokes him,* and Izuku struggles and kicks and tries to scream, but he can't because he's choking, no because he's *drowning--*

He dissociates. His body falls limp and his ghost soares into the air. He feels something different this time, a more distinguishable, noticeable tug, and he realizes it's because he's dying.

Because he's being *killed--*

He flies. He phazes through the villain's head, hoping the feeling is enough to startle it. The villain *does* notice it, and for just a moment, he raises his head and looks around, confused.

Yes! Izuku thinks, giving himself a mental high-five. *Yes, yes, yes, I did it--!*

A gust of wind shoots out of nowhere, and Izuku screeches, sent flying backwards through the air, out of the tunnel and back into the open. The slime villain and Izuku's lifeless body fly with him, the slime villain's body splashing and scattering in all directions.

Izuku's own body is on the ground in a heap, unmoving, and Izuku moves towards it curiously.

Wellp, that just happened, he thinks, and he slips back into his body. He aches all over, and his head pounds something awful, but he's alive, and he's not unconscious, which is good. He pushes himself off the ground and raises a hand to his head, wincing.

I must've been saved by a hero, Izuku thinks; his fingers touch a bruise on his head, and he yanks them back, hissing through his teeth. *Guess that's a good thing. There's only so much my Quirk can do against a villain that doesn't actually have a true body like most people...*

He hears footsteps and lifts his head further.

Immediately, his eyes go wide with shock.

It's All Might. All Might saved him.

Izuku has to fight to hold his ghost in his body, when really he wants to shoot up into outer space and scream it to the universe.

All Might had always been his inspiration ever since he was little, before he even found his Quirk. To actually meet him face to face like this was...it's *amazing.*

"Hello there, my boy!" All Might says, and Izuku comes *so close* to dissociating, just because he can't believe it. He feels, quite literally, floaty, and it takes every effort not to zoom straight into the stratosphere. "I'm sorry for getting you caught up with all that! Are you alright?"

Izuku nods frantically, beaming so brightly it hurts. "You're my idol!" he blurts, before he can stop himself. And then, all in one breath: "HolycrapI'vebeenwantingtomeetyouforyearsIhavesomanyquestions…"

He rambles on, and All Might chuckles, gathered the remains of the sludge villain's body into two identical...soda bottles? That's what they look like. Izuku wonders how so much slime can fit into such a small space, but then again, this is *All Might,* so he shouldn't be surprised by anything..

"--
AndI'vealwayslookeduptoyouandyou'resocoolandthanksforsavingmeand--"

All Might chuckles again, but this time he speaks. "Well, you're quite the chatterbox, aren't you?" he asks, and Izuku blushes, twisting his shoe into the ground. "That's quite alright, my boy! However, as much as I'd love to stay and chat, I have to be somewhere."

Izuku's head snaps up again. "W-Wait, you're leaving?"

"Mm-hmm. Crime doesn't turn itself in."

"B-But I…"

All Might claps his hands together, like he's pleading his case. "Sorry, kiddo, but I've reeeeally gotta go. Message me on my website, wouldja?"

“W-Wait, I--”

All Might turns away. “Thank you for your continued support!”

“W-wait, p-please--!”

Izuku reaches out, around the same time All Might crouches to blast into the sky.

It’s not really a conscious decision, and Izuku doesn’t really mean to do it. He latches onto All Might’s leg--with his actual body, dissociating right now wouldn’t do any good--and the hero launches into the sky with force to rival a rocket’s.

Honestly, with that whiplash, Izuku wonders if his soul *shouldn’t* be ripped from his body.

“That--” All Might says, spinning around to face him, “--was *incredibly stupid.* While I admire the tenacity of youth, there is a *fine line* between tenacious and insanity!”

Izuku is too busy trying to suck air back into his lungs to answer. They’re on a rooftop, where All Might landed shortly after blasting off, and Izuku feels vaguely like he’s being strangled. He agrees with All Might, here; it *was* incredibly reckless, the thing he’d done.

But that doesn’t matter.

He leaps to his feet. “All Might, c-can I--”

“No, I’m out of time, my boy,” All Might says, heading for the edge of the roof. “Sorry for running, but there’s somewhere I need to be. I have some unfinished business to attend to.”

“W-Wait, p-plea--!”

“Kiddo, I’m sorry, but I *can’t--”*

“Can I be a hero with a useless Quirk!?”

His voice has risen in pitch, an entire octave at that. He isn’t sure whether All Might understood him until the hero stops and glances over his shoulder.

Izuku stops, struggling to find the words. His hands clench and unclench at his sides. “I...I-I was born with...with an essentially useless

Quirk," he explains hesitantly. Kacchan's words, punches and jeers come back to him all at once, and he winces. "E-Even if...even if my Quirk isn't suitable for being a hero, c-can I… *can I still become one!?"*

His voice is a squeak now, a desperate plea, and after that he braces himself, waits, *hopes.*

"An unsuitable Quirk…?" All Might begins, but doesn't finish; there's a burst of steam and smoke, and Izuku throws up his hands to brace himself.

The answer is no.

All Might's answer is no, anyway. No, he can't be a hero with his measley power. Izuku hadn't explained what it was; he'd been too shocked to do so, in fact. All Might told him his greatest secret, that his smile was a lie to hide the truth, that, with little to no power, it was impossible to become a hero.

At that point Izuku's Quirk hadn't even mattered, because Izuku had been hoping for a miracle and that hope was *crushed.*

Now, Izuku walks down sidewalks, keeping head down. That floaty feeling is gone and he's left with an odd...emptiness, despite the fact that his soul is still very much attached to his physical body.

As he walks, he cries. A couple bystanders give him weird looks, but he doesn't even care.

He's tried his best. He was born with a Quirk, learned how to control his Quirk (for the most part--there are times when his emotions are enough to shake his soul from his body, but for the most part he can control it). He's only ever dreamed of becoming a hero. It's all he wants.

But…

...But…

He wants to scream. He wants to abandon his body somewhere and just float up into space and never be seen again. Kacchan's going to keep hitting him, keep hurting him and *burning* him. They don't go to the same school anymore but it's going to happen if Izuku tries becoming a hero.

It's like All Might said. In the end, Izuku knew it would turn out like this.

After all…

...With his power, he may as well just be Quirkless, right?

An explosion snaps him from his thoughts, and his head whips around. Smoke rises a few blocks down; he hears screams and shouts and watches as citizens disperse and run in all directions.

It's a villain attack, he knows it's a villain attack.

His feet move on their own as he goes to investigate.

It's not just any villain.

It's the slime villain. The slime villain who attacked Izuku earlier, and he (it?) has a hostage now. That's what the nearby citizens are screaming. The villain has a hostage, and it's a boy, a *kid,* and Izuku squeezes through the crowd to look, and--

It's Kacchan.

It's *Kacchan* and he's thrashing and screaming and yelling and his eyes are so furious but also so *scared,* and Izuku doesn't think he's ever seen Kacchan look like this.

Kacchan, his bully.

Kacchan, who made Izuku transfer schools.

Kacchan, screaming and thrashing and *scared.*

And Izuku doesn't think. Doesn't give himself the chance to think.

He *sprints.*

His feet slam into the ground, one after the other, over and over and over again as he runs, runs, *runs.* This is bad, this is *horrible* and he *can't let the villain take Kacchan's life.* He doesn't know why. He hates Kacchan and Kacchan hates him and he doesn't know why he wants to save him so desperately.

He doesn't know *why,* only that he *does.*

He doesn't dissociate--that hadn't worked on the slime villain earlier so he doesn't do it again. Rather, he swings his backpack around and hurls it with all his might at the slime villain's bulging eyes. A notebook flies free, stabs the slime villain in the eye with the corner, and the villain lets out a roar of pain, releasing his grip on Kacchan for a mere second.

Kacchan coughs, chokes, tries to get his breath back. Izuku claws and grabs at the villain's body, trying to pull Kacchan free.

"You worthle--GET OUT OF HERE!" Kacchan yells furiously, glaring at Izuku like he's the one attacking him, not the slime villain. *"You worthless piece of crap, I don't need your help--!"*

"SHUT UP!" Izuku snaps back at him, suddenly very furious. He's crying now, sure, but he's angrier than he's been in a long, long time. "Shut *up,* Kacchan! Do you think I *care* that you don't think you need my help!? Do you think I care about that at all!?"

Kacchan falls silent immediately.

"You aren't some kind of immortal, unstoppable being, Kacchan, you're human!" Izuku cries, voice breaking. *"You're human, just like I am! And I can't just stand back and let you die!"*

And then, All Might steps in. The situation is resolved within the next ten seconds.

Izuku wonders if it'd be rude to dissociate and sink right into the ground. He knows that he most certainly *could,* what with his Quirk, but he decides not to. It *would* be pretty rude. What said "screw you" more than leaving your body and sinking into the ground?

A couple of pros are chewing him out, telling him that it was dumb to step in and that he could have been killed. They're angry, all of them, scolding him and telling him he's an idiot.

Izuku apologizes, but doesn't mean it. He'd do it again in a heartbeat.

All Might is swamped by reporters, so Izuku doesn't bother trying to talk to him this time. Not right now, at the very least. When the pros are (finally) done chewing Izuku out, he gets to his feet and runs home.

He never looks back once.

He tumbles through the door and immediately dissociates. He flees his body and shoots up to his room; he hears his mother call after him, but doesn't really care. She'll find him in a few seconds, but he's going to take those few seconds to gather his thoughts. Outside his own body, thank you very much.

"Izuku!? Izu-- *AHH!"*

Oh. His mother must have found his body. Now he feels bad for not warning her. You would think, though, that she'd be used to seeing his lifeless body crumpled in random places.

Still, though.

He hears her footsteps, storming up towards his room, and he hovers over his bed and braces himself.

Mom flings open the door. Her eyes are watering, but her teeth are gritted.

"You have *no reason to be doing that,* young man!" Mom shouts at him (or, not directly at him--she can't see him, of course). Izuku flinches, staring through his shoes at the ground. "Go get your body, Izuku! You can't keep doing that!"

She leaves the room, and he waits until she steps off the last stair before fleeing back towards his physical body.

He slips inside. The pain starts immediately, this time on his arm. A new bruise, then. Whoopty-do. His mother is right, he really *does* have to stop doing that. He's going to wind up seriously hurting himself one of these days…

He stands and slinks into the kitchen, dragging his feet. He hears Mom bustling about, opening and closing the freezer door; a second later, she steps in front of him and hands him an ice pack. He takes it and presses it to his arm.

"Thanks, Mom," he says.

She nods wordlessly, then speaks. "I saw the news."

Izuku tenses.

If Mom notices, she gives no indication that she does. Rather, she plunges on. "You leapt in there to save that Katsuki boy, even

though…" Her eyes water, but the tears don't fall. Yet. "Even though he…"

Izuku swallows thickly. "He was scared, Mom. He was in danger. I couldn't just..."

"I know he was, I-I just..." Mom wrings her hands together, then sighs and shakes her head. When she meets his gaze again, she's smiling gently, but there's pain in her eyes. "You really are too goldenhearted for your own good, Izuku."

Izuku bites his lip. "It's probably going to get me killed someday. O-Or, y'know, if toppling down the stairs again doesn't…"

His mother frowns. "I know you're trying to be funny, but it's not funny."

"I-I know." He lowers the ice; the bruise stings, but he's had worse.

Mom takes the ice pack from his hand and puts it back in the freezer. "The heroes who were on-sight at the time," she begins. "What did they say to you jumping in like that?"

"O-Oh, t-they...they were...they were mad at me." Izuku shifts his weight awkwardly. "They chewed me out pretty good, said I must've had some kind of...some kind of a death wish..."

Mom freezes, hand still on the door.

"...Mom…?"

"They chewed *you* out," his mother says, and there's venom in her tone. Izuku takes a step backwards. "They were going to stand back and let that boy die and they chewed *you* out for helping."

"I-It's fine, Mom…"

"I don't think it's fine," Mom snaps, and Izuku takes another step backwards. "They slack off on their jobs so badly a *boy* has to jump in, and then they scold the boy for it?"

"I-I know, b-but…" Izuku shifts again. "You don't...you don't need to get so upset about it, really. I-I'm...I-I'm fine, it's fine, I promise."

The problem is, he's really not sure whether or not he means it.

His mom accepts it, though, although she doesn't seem happy about it.

“I know,” she says. “I’m…I’m sorry for shouting at you when you came in. That wasn’t right.”

“I-It’s okay,” Izuku answers, running a hand through his hair. “You’re right, I should stop dropping like that. Someday I’ll get better with that, I promise, just…”

A light bulb goes off in his head, and he grins.

“…Nobody knows when.”

His mother stares at him.

“Izuku.”

Zip.

“IZUKU.”

And he’s gone again.

The next day sucks.

If the bullying ended the day he transferred schools and got away from Kacchan, it’d be all he could ever ask for. Unfortunately, it didn’t. It’s not nearly as bad at his new school, considering Kacchan isn’t *here,* but even so, it sucks. It *royally* sucks.

“Oh, look! It’s the freak who went after the slime villain!” one of said bullies jeers, pointing at him. Behind him, two other bullies laugh and cackle. “Hey, what were you tryin’ to do, huh? Be a hero?”

“Stop it,” Izuku hisses under his breath--not that it’s ever done any good. Not that it’ll *ever* do any good.

The bullies laugh just a little louder, and Izuku power walks out of the classroom. He endures the school day without zooming out of his body (though he’s come close a fair few times), then heads home with a heavy heart.

He makes it to his neighborhood.

And then a voice calls out to him.

“My boy!”

Izuku freezes, one foot still in the air mid-step, and spins around. All Might--not the "hero," but the "person," his true form--sprints towards him, looking frantic.

Wellp, Izuku thinks, a pull at his chest, *guess I'll die--*

"Hold on," All Might pants, and Izuku barely manages to keep his ghost attached to his body where it belongs. All Might straightens up to look at him, panting like he'd run the whole way.

"I'm...sorry...I didn't contact you sooner," All Might breathes. "You ran home as soon as the incident was resolved and, well, I couldn't shake the press fast enough to get to you. I'm truly sorry."

Izuku is shaking his head before All Might finishes speaking. "N-No, it's okay!" he says, waving his hands back and forth. "I-It's really fine, honest. A-after all…" He lowers his hands and looks down at his shoes, for once not translucent. "...I'm the one who got in the way. I-I'm sorry--"

"That's where you're wrong, kiddo."

Izuku stops, and his head snaps up. All Might smiles back at him.

"If it wasn't for you," All Might says, "I wouldn't have been spurred to act when I did."

Izuku's eyes go wide.

"On the rooftop, yesterday…" All Might's voice is thick. "I...I said some things that I regret, some things that I know hurt you. I told you you couldn't become a hero, and that...that was wrong of me. I'm sorry. *And."*

(He raises a finger as Izuku opens his mouth, and Izuku stops, letting the hero continue.)

"...I'm here now to tell you something. Something I should've said the day I met you."

Izuku listens, holding onto every word.

"Top heroes have stories from their school days," All Might begins slowly. "And most of those stories have one thing in common: their bodies moved, before they had the chance to think."

And then, Izuku's hit with it. His eyes burn, and he ducks his head, his

chest filling with knots.

When All Might speaks again, there's a smile in his words.

"That happened to you, too, didn't it?"

Izuku nods, teeth gritted. His knees hit the asphalt, his hands clutch his chest, and he *sobs.*

"Midoriya...my boy… *you can become a hero."*

The tears flow. The dam breaks. He's overwhelmed. He ties his spirit to his body, because right now would be a *bad time* to drop.

Is this happening? Is this really, *really* happening right now? He can't believe it. He's almost *scared* to believe it.

This is it, he thinks, his throat tight, like he's being strangled. *This is it, It can't get any better than this, it can't...*

"I deem you worthy of my power," All Might goes on. "My Quirk is yours to inherit."

Izuku's head snaps up, tears flying. His mind goes blank.

"What."

"My Quirk," All Might continues, like that makes any more sense. "If you'll accept it, I'd like to make you my successor."

"What."

"My Quirk," All Might says, for a third time. "It's a power to pass on power, a power to carry hope and light through generations to come. The incarnation of power, one might say, cultivated from one user to the other. It's called..."

At this, All Might pauses dramatically.

"...One For All. Cultivated from generation to generation. A light to pierce through the darkness. A hope when there is no other hope."

Izuku blinks. "One...For All…?"

"Exactly!" All Might says, swinging an arm around to point at him. "And, if you'll accept it...then this power is yours!"

Izuku blinks again.

He's asking me…

…Asking me if I want his power. Asking me if I want what could possibly be the most powerful Quirk in the world.

I can be a hero. With this power--no, with his *power…*

Is it really possible?

Can I really…?

"I'd understand if you want more time to think about it," All Might says, turning away briefly. "It's a hard decision to make, I'm sure, but--"

"I'll do it!"

All Might spins towards him again. "Well, that was quick. You sure, kiddo? You've thought it over?"

Izuku nods shakily. "If…I-If I can become a hero," he says, "then, then I…I want to try! I want to be a hero more than anything else in the world, so…I-I'll do it!"

All Might smiles. "In that case, my boy," he says, "I look forward to working with you. Oh, hold on…"

He pauses, resting his chin in his hand for a moment.

"You mentioned having a Quirk," he says, to which Izuku nods. "Well, would you mind sharing just what kind of Quirk that is?"

"Oh!" Izuku says; he wipes the remaining tear tracks off his face with his sleeves, then grins. "I can do *this!"*

He snaps his fingers, just to be dramatic, and his spirit leaves his body to crumple on the ground in a heap.

Izuku hadn't thought it possible for a grown man to make such a shrill, high-pitched noise, but life is full of surprises.

My Shot

Chapter Summary

"My Shot" from Hamilton

"I am not throwin' away my shot.
I am not throwin' away my shot.
Y'know I'm just like my country,
I'm young, scrappy and hungry,
And I'm not throwin' away my shot."

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Izuku tumbles through the front door and immediately falls, catching himself on his hands and knees. His eyes burn as he gasps for breath, and his chest feels oddly tight.

Further into the house, he hears running water. "Izuku! If I walk out there and your body's on the porch, I'm going to be upset!"

"N-No, I'm still in my body!" Izuku hollers back, shakily getting to his feet. He hears the tap cut, followed by footsteps. His mother turns the corner from the kitchen, drying her hands on her apron.

She takes one look at his face, and her eyes go wide. "What happened?" she asks--and of course she expects the worst. She's learned to expect the worst.

"N-Nothing happened," Izuku assures her--and then, a second later, "I-I mean, w-well, nothing *bad* happened, i-it's just...there's this...there's this *thing,* this thing that happened, a-and i-i-it's k-kind of--"

She steps forward and settles her hands on his forearms. "Izuku."

"Y-Yeah?"

"Calm down. You're going to do it again."

"R-R-Right, I-I, erm, d-do...d-do you gotta sec?"

His mother nods. "Of course." She doesn't release him, merely guides him out of the doorway and into the living room. Izuku drags his feet

as he follows; his spirit longs to zip out of his body and disappear into the floor or something, but he represses the urge.

They sit down on the couch, and while Mom turns to him, Izuku turns the other way, fidgeting nervously.

“S-S-So, I, um…” Izuku messes with a loose string on his shirt. “...I met All Might today.”

Mom’s eyes go wide. “You...you actually met him?” she asks, to which Izuku nods. “Izuku, that’s wonderful!” she exclaims. “What’s the problem, then? What are you nervous about?”

“HeaskedmeifIwantedtobehissuccessorandIsaidyes.”

His mother blinks. “Izuku.”

Izuku takes in a breath. “He...he asked me to be his successor,” he answers at length, calming down enough to form coherent sentences. “A-And...A-And I said yes.”

He watches, watches his mother’s eyes widen with shock, watches her cup both hands around her mouth.

“D-Don’t freak out!” Izuku shrieks, like the complete hypocrite that he is, his voice an octave higher than usual. “Just let...let me explain it, okay?”

She doesn’t look any less horrified, but she nods, and Izuku tells her everything--everything about One For All, that is. He leaves out All Might’s true form for now, merely because he isn’t sure that’s something the hero wants to be shared; but nothing else is hidden.

He tells her about One For All, how it’s a Quirk that cultivates power, to be passed down through generations to maintain hope and peace. She listens, taking this in and nodding periodically. The look on her face doesn’t change, though, which is a little concerning.

“--I said yes,” Izuku finishes, his chest tight. More than ever, he wants to zip off and hide in a closet somewhere. Or maybe just phase through the floor, that’s an option too. “He...He offered me his power, and...and I said yes.”

Mom stares at him. “I-Izuku, that’s--!”

“I know it’s crazy!” Izuku blurts, before he knows what he’s saying. He

runs both hands through his hair and leaves them there, tugging at his locks. “I-I know it’s insane, I-I know it’s...I-I know it’s...it’s unbelievable, and it’s crazy, a-and it’s dangerous, b-but…”

“You think you can become a hero with some useless Quirk like that!?”

“Is he even human? That’s a really weird Quirk…”

“Creepy! He’s creepy, that’s what! Like some kind of ghost out of a scary movie!”

“Is this the kind of person you wanna be, huh!? Just some worthless coward!?”

“There’s no other way,” Izuku says, raising his head to meet her gaze. She looks no less reassured, no less horrified, but she’s listening. “If...If I want to be a hero...this is how I have to do it.”

He ducks his head and waits for the storm.

“...Izuku…”

He sucks in a sharp breath.

“Izuku, look at me.”

I don’t want to, he thinks, but raises his head anyway. She looks at him, takes his hands in hers and holds his gaze.

“I’m...I’m proud of you, Izuku,” Mom says, her voice shaking. “You’ve always done your best, always tried to do the right thing, and...if you want...to be All Might’s successor...if it’s something that *you want* and not something you’re being pressured into, then...t-then I’ll support you.”

Izuku blinks. His eyes burn. “Mom…”

“You have to promise me something, though, Izuku,” she says quickly, squeezing his fingers, and he nods and waits. “Promise me you’ll be careful. Promise me that...that you’ll…” She pauses, sucks in a breath. “...Promise you’ll always come home to me.”

Izuku nods readily. “I promise,” he says. “Even if I have to abandon my body to do it.”

She laughs weakly and shakes her head. “I’d really rather you didn’t do that, Izuku,” she says. “You know I don’t like it.”

“I-I know, I’m kidding,” he says, and he smiles. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” She smiles back. “And, I’m assuming this isn’t something you can talk about freely. This…becoming All Might’s successor, I mean.”

Izuku shakes his head immediately. “N-Not at all,” he says. “All Might said it was alright if I told you, but…yeah, it’s…it’s supposed to be a secret, because…”

He doesn’t finish, and he doesn’t need to; she nods in understanding, squeezing his fingers again.

“I know,” she says, biting her lip for a moment. “If anyone else were to find out…”

There are a couple reasons, really. The first one has to do with keeping peace and hope at the forefront of society. To maintain a beacon to light back the darkness.

The second, “closer to home” reason has to do with Izuku’s personal safety. Because what villains *wouldn’t* try to forcefully steal All Might’s power away from him at any means necessary?

He shakes his head. *That* isn’t a pleasant thought.

His mother rises to her feet, releasing his hands, and Izuku stands. “I have dinner ready, if you’re hungry,” she offers.

Izuku beams. “Starving.”

“Remind me why I’m doing this again?” Izuku gasps, on his hands and knees in the sand with a rope clutched in his balled fists. The other end of the rope is tied around a trashed, broken refrigerator.

“It’s like I said!” All Might answers simply. “You aren’t a proper vessel yet, my boy!”

Izuku presses his forehead into the dirt. *“That’s the opposite of what you said yesterday!”*

“No, no, you misunderstand me,” All Might continues, and Izuku lifts his head. “In heart and in spirit, you’re the perfect vessel for One For All. However, *physically…”* He gestures vaguely in Izuku’s general direction. “…We have some work to do. If you force One For All onto an unprepared vessel, it’s highly likely that your limbs will blow off.”

Izuku blinks. “My limbs will what now.”

“Anyway--”

He changed the subject, Izuku thinks darkly.

“--That’s why we’re here now,” All Might goes on, spreading his arms and gesturing at the beach, loaded with garbage as far as the eye can see. “Your first objective as a hero-to-be, Young Midoriya...is clearing this horizon!”

Izuku blinks at the garbage.

Binks at All Might.

“...WHAT!?”

The boy has no presence.

Sometimes, Toshinori thinks he’s alone, only to turn and see the boy standing in the corner of his eye. It’s scared the living daylights out of him more than once, and the boy apologizes profusely every time, swearing that he didn’t mean to startle him and that he’ll try not to do it again.

Except, it does happen again, several times, because the boy simply *has no presence.* It’s like he’s not even *there,* even when he *is* in his physical form.

And Toshinori wishes that’s the most unsettling thing there is about Izuku Midoriya.

“Tell me more about your Quirk, my boy,” Toshinori offers; Izuku is on the ground, face-down in the sand, back heaving with every breath.

Izuku raises his head and spits sand out of his mouth. “There’s...t-there’s really not much to it,” he pants, pushing himself off the ground. Sweat sticks sand to his forearms, but he makes no move to wipe it away. He stopped doing that a while ago. “I just...turn into a ghost.”

“Don’t be so quick to write it off,” Toshinori says, shaking his head. “I don’t think I’ve ever heard of something quite like it before. Tell me, Midoriya, what happens to your body when you, ahh... *leave* it?”

“M-My actual body…?”

Toshinori nods. “Do you still breathe, does your heart stop, that sort of thing.”

“O-Oh.” Izuku wipes sand off his face with his hands. It’s counterproductive, though, because there’s sand on his knuckles too. “I-It’s kinda...confusing. My heart doesn’t stop, and I-I still breathe, but...it’s really...faint, I guess? Like, my breathing is really shallow, and you can’t hear my heartbeat unless you really listen out for it.”

“I see.” Toshinori thinks this over. It’s a bit terrifying, though, when he thinks about it too much, so he moves on quickly. “Does it have any negative, physical effect on your body, or…?”

“Not unless I try interacting with the physical world,” Izuku answers plainly. “If I do that for more than a few seconds it usually makes me nauseous. O-Oh, and I can’t go longer than twelve hours outside my body.”

Toshinori blinks. That’s new. “Why not?”

“I...I don’t know.” Izuku pauses, looks down at the sand. He grabs a fistful of it and lets it run through his fingers. A nervous habit, perhaps. “I’ve never...actually done it. Just, whenever it gets close to being twelve hours I just...start feeling strangled. Which is weird, because ghosts don’t have *lungs,* but...I don’t know, it’s strange. I’m...scared to find out what would happen if I actually, you know...stayed out for longer than twelve hours.”

“If you think it’s dangerous to attempt, you should avoid it,” Toshinori advises. “Your Quirk is an odd one, my boy. If you think something might be wrong, you’re best stopping while you’re ahead. Now then--!” He claps his hands together. “Please resume!”

Izuku scrambles to his feet, salutes cheesily, and runs off.

Toshinori has seen Izuku “die” (for lack of better word) a fair amount of times thus far, but that doesn’t mean he’ll ever get used to it.

There’s no warning, never a warning, never any indication that he’s about to drop. He could be smiling and laughing one moment, and the next moment, his eyes roll back in his head and he’s limp and unmoving on the ground.

Toshinori wonders, briefly, if Izuku realizes how terrifying a sight it is to behold. To watch a person--a *kid*-- just *drop* like that, for no apparent reason. The first time Izuku did it, Toshinori had actually panicked, because there was no way the boy could just drop like that in his own free with.

Except he did. Except he *does.*

That's…

...Well, Toshinori doesn't really know *what* to think about that.

And then, there's the scar.

Toshinori noticed it the day they met, but never brought it up: Izuku has a rather large scar that starts at his left temple, cuts diagonally along the bridge of his nose, then ends at his right cheek. It's jagged and white and far too prominent for a boy his age, and Toshinori has no idea how it got there.

He doesn't mention it for a long time. After all, Toshinori has scars of his own, scars he doesn't like to talk about, and he thinks that maybe, Izuku sees his scar the same way.

Except, curiosity gets the better of him eventually, and he asks.

"Midoriya, my boy, how did you get that scar?"

Izuku frowns at him; he's loading a box of something into the back of a truck. Toshinori doesn't know what this "something" is, only that it must be heavy, considering Izuku's struggle.

"Oh." Izuku pushes the box over the edge and turns towards him fully, ignoring the crash and shatter as the box tips into the back of the truck. "This?" He traces the scar on his face with his index finger, like he's done it a million times.

Toshinori nods. "And, you don't have to tell me if you don't feel comfortable, I simply--"

"Ahh, no, it's fine!" Izuku stammers in his haste to answer, and then, he laughs shakily, rubbing the back of his neck. "It's...actually a pretty funny story...do you, erm, do you wanna hear it…?"

"If you're alright with sharing."

This is definitely the right thing to say, because Izuku beams and

launches right into it.

“So, right after I transferred schools in junior high, this kid in my class thought it’d be funny to prank the new kid in front of everybody in the class. Something about public humiliation, I guess, I don’t know. Anyway, he ended up actually doing it, and he scared me so badly I just, y’know, *took off.”*

Izuku laughs again, less shakily this time, and he goes on, gesturing with his hands.

“So picture this: I’m a ghost, and my physical head slams into the side of the desk,” Izuku explains animatedly. “My classmates didn’t know about my Quirk yet, though, so to them it just looked like I dropped dead, I think.

“Anyway, so, I split my head open, there’s blood all over the desk, and everyone just starts *screaming,* and I’m just…I’m just *floating* there, watching it all go down. I was kinda…scared, I think, because I didn’t try calling out to anyone to let them know I was okay. The teacher *freaked,* he was worse than everyone else, and--”

The boy goes on like this for quite some time, explaining the entire story, and Toshinori is relieved. At least the boy doesn’t have emotional burdens attached to his scars.

Except…he mentioned transferring schools.

Transferring schools.

Huh.

Well…

…That’s new information.

Ten months fly by, and the day of the U.A. entrance exam arrives. To say Izuku is nervous would be the greatest understatement in the world.

He completed his task and cleared the horizon of Dagobah beach; the first rays of sunlights stretch over the sands, bathing it orange and yellow. There isn’t a piece of garbage in sight.

“You did well, my boy!” All Might says, beaming--but of course that’s a given. “And just in the nick of time, too!”

Izuku manages a shaky smile. He's covered in sweat and dirt and who knows what else, but none of that matters. Ten months. Ten months of working himself to the ground and he's finally *here.*

He's made it. There was a finish line set before him and he's finally *crossed it.*

He sniffs, wiping his eyes with the backs of his hands. "I-It a-almost doesn't seem fair," he murmurs, throat tight. "Y-You giving me this power, I-I mean…"

"What do you mean?" All Might asks quizzically. "Midoriya, receiving something and earning something are two very different things. And believe me, you earned this power through your own efforts."

Izuku wipes his eyes with the back of his hand, then straightens up. *That's right,* he thinks. *Ten long months of training, clearing the horizon. Becoming a hero…*

(All Might plucks a strand of hair from his head.)

…This is my start!

"Eat this!" All Might says, holding the strand out to him.

Izuku blinks.

"What?"

Mental note: hair does not go down easily.

It's unpleasant, and throughout the entirety of the day, Izuku finds himself swallowing reflexively. He tries not to think about it, really, he does, but he has a knack for overthinking things.

He sucks in a deep breath, staring at the towering building before him. U.A. High, the highschool of his dreams, and he's finally able to go, finally able to take the entrance exam.

Finally able to become a hero.

Kacchan storms past him, and on instinct, Izuku springs out of the way. Kacchan doesn't talk to him, doesn't give him so much as a glance; he storms up the front steps with a group of students and disappears within the double doors.

Izuku is left there, staring for a moment or two--then, he shakes his head feverishly, setting his resolve.

This is it, he tells himself, starting towards the doors. *The first step...to becoming a hero!*

And with that, he promptly trips over his own feet and falls towards the ground.

Well, this is the end, he thinks--he's crumpled to the ground enough times that it doesn't really bother him anymore--

He stops.

Mid-air, he stops.

And it's not because of anything he did.

He stares at the ground, inches away from his nose.

"Are you okay?"

There are hands on his shoulders, pushing him upright and setting him back on his feet where he belongs. It's a girl, a girl with bright eyes and an even brighter smile, and Izuku stares at her without meaning to

"It's my Quirk!" the girl says cheerfully, tapping her fingertips together, and it's a miracle that Izuku's ghost actually stays in his body because *holy crap there's a girl.* "I-I'm sorry for using it without asking! But it would be bad luck if you fell, right? Well, I have to go inside! Good luck!"

She runs off, and a second or two later, once he's sure he can keep his ghost in his body where it belongs, he runs in after her.

Roughly thirty minutes later finds the applying students split into several groups, each group set at a particular training city on-campus.

This place is massive, Izuku thinks, staring up at the structure's walls. Behind it lies a mock-city, though it's so enormous it may as well be a real one. *And this is only* one *of the training sections?*

He supposes it only makes sense. U.A. High is the most prestigious hero academy in Japan, after all. Of course it's overkill.

Kacchan isn't in this group with him; however, the nice girl from earlier is, along with...someone else Izuku accidently upset by mumbling excessively under his breath while Present Mic was explaining the exercise a short while ago.

Izuku glances over his shoulder. The boy he upset earlier is there, arms crossed; he straightens his glasses, looking much too serious for such an occasion.

"THE EXAM STARTS NOW!"

The voice booms overhead--Present Mic again, and all heads snap upwards in confusion.

"THERE'S NO TIME TO WASTE, GO!" Present Mic's voice thunders. *"BETTER HURRY UP! THE CLOCK'S TICKIN'!"*

The confusion is replaced with determination, and when the students charge through the double doors and into the training city, Izuku runs with them.

Robots, he calls to mind, turning a corner quickly and branching away from the rest of the students. *This exam is determined by a point system depending on how many robots you beat. I wonder…*

A robot spins around the corner. It has a single, glowing red eye that locks on Izuku immediately.

"Target acquired," the robot's voice chirps, followed by a series of clicks and whistles.

Immediately Izuku dissociates. His body hits the ground beneath him and he charges at the robot.

He phases through the metal shell. An uncomfortable, indescribable feeling comes over him for a second, and he shivers. He's never liked phasing through things, but this is a special occasion.

He's inside the robot, wires and cross-beams everywhere, and Izuku doesn't waste any time. The robot is locked on his physical body; he has to hurry.

He concentrates on his hands--just his hands, nothing more--and then, he reaches out and grabs two handfuls of wires, blues and reds and yellows. He gets a firm grip on them and *yanks.*

The wires tear free, and Izuku releases them and zips out of the robot's body, hovering in the air above it. The robot creaks and groans and stumbles; and then, the flashing light of its mechanical eye flickers and goes out.

Yes! Izuku cheers, zooming back into his body. His stomach twists, and he has a new bruise on his head, but he ignores that, gets to his feet, and keeps running.

He does the same thing to the next robot he sees, and then to the next one after that. He doesn't keep count; numbers would just slow him down at this point. Besides, he'll find out either way on the test results if he's accepted--

No, when *I'm accepted,* he corrects himself, grabbing fistfulls of wires and yanking them, successfully maiming the robot. *I'm going to get in. I'm going to get in.*

I have to get in.

He takes off running, on the lookout for more robots. He doesn't know how many he's taken down yet, and it doesn't matter. He keeps running, down twisting roads and sidewalks.

He's puked a total of three times since he began dismantling the robots from the inside, and acid leaves a bitter taste in his mouth. It only makes sense, considering how mentally taxing it is to interact with the physical world as a spirit, but he ignores it and moves on.

I have to get in, I have to get in, I have to get in--

He stumbles into a clearing and skids to a halt.

A ton of other students are here, taking down robots how they see fit. The girl from earlier taps robots, sends them into the air, then smashes them into the ground with a mere touch of her fingertips. The boy from earlier runs and slams into robots feet-first; he has some kind of speed Quirk, then.

"TIME'S ALMOST UP!" a voice overhead booms. *"MAKE THIS COUNT, EVERYBODY!"*

Izuku turns down another alleyway and runs. He doesn't see any robots here yet, but he keeps looking anyway.

It's odd that there haven't been any zero-pointers yet, Izuku thinks as his

shoes slam into the ground, one after the other. *You'd think that by now, so far into the exam--*

The ground lurches beneath him, and Izuku is thrown off his feet, scraping his palms on the concrete as he catches himself. He flips over onto his back and stares up at the sky; the ground trembles again, even more violently this time, and Izuku lets out a long, heaving sigh.

Wellp, I just jinxed it, didn't I, he thinks dryly, and he scrambles to his feet and takes off running in the direction from whence he came.

He sprints back into the clearing. Around him, students charge down the street in the opposite direction, screaming and yelling in terror. Izuku's head snaps up and he looks at the object of their terror, not really knowing what to expect.

And there's the zero-pointer, towering at a height well over the city's highest skyscrapers, metal eyes beady and laser-focused. Izuku's heart begins to pound, and his eyes go wide with shock and horror.

Wait...THAT'S the zero-pointer!? Izuku thinks, his mind drawn on a blank. *But that's...isn't that a little overkill!?*

And then he remembers that this is U.A., literal overkill incarnate.

There's no point in taking it out, literally, Izuku thinks, ready to turn and run off--for a few reasons, actually, 1) being he needs more points and 2) being he really, really doesn't want to get squashed by that thing. *And even if there was, there's no way I can pull out wires to bring it down like I did with the smaller ones. Those wires must be massive.*

He's about to turn when he catches something out of the corner of his eye.

The nice girl from earlier, just a little ways in front of the zero-pointer, pinned down by the legs with large chunks of cement.

Izuku's mind goes blank. The screams and shouts of fellow heroes-to-be fade out until he can't hear anything at all.

"It'd be bad luck if you fell, right?"

Izuku doesn't think about it.

He runs towards the robot and fires up One For All for the very first time.

One For All does *not* make a good first impression, and Izuku is sent home after breaking both legs and one arm--the arm from when he'd punched, and the legs from when he'd leapt into the air to deliver said punch.

The school's nurse had fixed him up while he was unconscious, taking special care with his legs, then sent him home with a sling and a promise that his broken arm would be healed within the next couple of days.

That's good, Izuku supposes. He doesn't know how many robots he took out minus the zero-pointer, and he only hopes the amount is enough to get him into U.A.

He spends the next day feverish in bed. Maintaining a semi-physical connection with the world while a ghost always spelled ill-will for his actual body, and usually he can push through it after throwing up once or twice. However, coupled with the exhaustion of Recovery Girl's Quirk on his broken bones, he's bedridden for a full twenty four hours.

"So...this new power of yours," Mom starts, simply but worriedly, changing out the rag on his forehead; he's in bed and she's sitting beside him. She's not as worried now as she used to be whenever this happened. It's happened often enough in the past for her to take it all in stride now. "It...breaks your bones."

"Well, right now it does," Izuku croaks. His throat feels like sandpaper. "But I'll...um…" He frowns, not really sure what train of thought he'd been on. "I'll...talk to All Might about it."

Mom hums. "You do that," she says. "The last thing *you* need is another self-destructive Quirk."

That's…

That's fair.

"B-Believe me, it's not fun for me, either," Izuku says, and he sighs. "Thanks for, y'know...not freaking out about all this."

She sighs. "I try not to, but you really do worry me sometimes."

"I know. I'm sorry."

She sighs again, but this time, she shakes her head. "Just...try to be

careful," she says. "I know being a hero isn't exactly the...the *safest* line of work out there, but...stay safe, okay?"

He nods. "I will. I promise."

"Good." She brushes his hair out of his face and kisses his temple. "Sleep well."

"You too. Goodnight. Love you."

"I love you, too, Izuku."

She shuts off the light and leaves the room, pulling the door shut behind her.

Toshinori is kicking himself in the butt. He should've warned the kid about the physical backlash of using One For All.

Sure, the kid trained for ten months and was definitely a suitable vessel, but...it wasn't ideal. Ten months was just barely enough for his body to be able to harness the Quirk without literally exploding. It's going to take a long time before Izuku can use it without injuring himself.

Still, though. Toshinori should've warned the kid and he feels incredibly guilty for not doing so.

He stands on the shores of Dagobah beach, the horizon clear and the moonlight reflecting off the ocean waves. He hasn't heard from the kid for the past couple of days, and a part of him is worried.

...No, actually, *all* of him is worried.

After a lot of mental debate, he pulls out his phone and finds Izuku's number. They'd been contacting each other for the past ten months; it's the most convenient way to plan training days.

Toshinori's thumbs swipe across the screen.

Toshinori
Haven't heard from you in a while.
How are you doing?

He doesn't really expect a response, so he's surprised when his phone buzzes exactly ten seconds later.

Izuku Midoriya
lowkey dying but okay
you?

Toshinori
Well, I'm officially worried.
You alright?

Izuku Midoriya
I'm sick.
Something about overusing my Quirk.
Idk it's always been really confusing.
Oh and my arm's still broken so there's that.

Toshinori
I'm sorry. I should have warned you about that.

Izuku Midoriya
It's fine. I did kind of drop dead in front of you
as a first impression so…we're even.
Anyway, do you need something…?

Toshinori
I was going to ask if you could meet me at Dagobah.
But since you're sick it'll have to wait until another day.

Izuku Midoriya
Yeah you're probably right.
It's okay, though. I'll be with you in spirit!

Toshinori takes it in the metaphorical sense, of course, and is shocked when Izuku--as a ghost--actually shows up.

"You meant that literally," Toshinori says flatly. He doesn't know why he even bothers being surprised by this kid anymore.

He can't see the boy, but he can feel Izuku's grin. "Never let it be said I turned down the opportunity for a good joke."

Chapter End Notes

Follow me on tumblr!:
highabovethecloudssomewhere.tumblr.com

Things:

-Izuku's Quirk is kinda complicated and I'll be going over it a lot more in future chapters. So don't worry about that. :)
-I'll go over Izuku's test results from the entrance exam soon.
-I'm going through canon after all. Not changing everything but changing what is directly altered by this AU.
-I was talking with my peeps on Discord and decided that Izuku owns a t-shirt that says "Dead inside" on the front, and then "No, literally" on the back.
-I'msoexcitedtocovertheUSJinvasionandtheSportsFestivalYEET

Thanks for all your support, you guys! I was kinda horrible at responding to comments this time around bc I've been sick/out of it but thanks so much! I love you all. <3

Wellp, until next time, go beyond! PLUS ULTRA!!

Burn

Chapter Summary

"Burn" from Hamilton

“You have torn it all apart,
I am watching it,
Burn.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The letter comes late at night roughly a week later, after Izuku is completely recovered. The envelope has “U.A. HIGH” written in golden font on the front, and Izuku knows in a heartbeat that it’s his results from the entrance exam.

He’s in his room now, and it’d be completely dark if it weren’t for his desk lamp. In front of him on the desk’s surface lies the envelope, still sealed, and for a while, he does nothing but stare at it.

I know I did well, he thinks, taking up the envelope and examining it with great care. The golden letters catch the light of the desk lamp, like they’re winking at him. *I know I took down a lot of robots as a ghost, but…I wasn’t keeping count, so it could be anything…*

Eventually, he can’t take the suspense any longer, and he tears the envelope open. There’s a written letter and a small, disc-shaped object about an inch thick. The moment it hits the table, there’s a small *clicking* sound, and then, a projection lights up over it.

“YOUNG MIDORIYA! I AM HERE AS A PROJECTION!”

Izuku shrieks and throws himself backwards, falling out of the desk chair and landing in a heap on the floor. He winces briefly, makes sure his spirit is attached to hits body where it belongs, then bounces back to his feet and stares at the projection.

It’s All Might, and of course it is--no one else has a voice quite as booming and enthusiastic as him. But that’s almost more confusing.

“Now, I know what you’re thinking!” All Might goes on animatedly. *“What am I doing at U.A., you ask? Well, the answer to that is quite*

simple--I was offered a job by the principal, and of course I accepted! Starting this upcoming school year, I'll have the privilege of working as a teacher to raise up the next generation of heroes!"

Beside himself, Izuku beams. Considering how horrible a handle he currently has on One For All, it'd be unfortunate if All Might *wasn't* teaching at U.A.

"But, this isn't about that right now!" All Might continues: *"This is about your test results, Young Midoriya, and whether or not you passed the entrance exam."*

Izuku's smile fades, and he clutches the edge of his desk.

Please be enough, please be enough, please be enough…

"You passed the written exam," All Might says, *"but I'm sure you've already figured that just through self-scoring."* (He's right.) *"As for the physical exam, Young Midoriya…"*

Izuku bites his lip. *Please be enough, please be enough, please be enough--*

The numbers flash on-screen.

RESCUE POINTS: 60
COMBAT POINTS: 79

Izuku's eyes go wide.

…I got…

…WHAT!?

He knew he'd taken out a lot of robots--the physical backlash it'd had on his body was enough to tell him that much--but…but *seventy nine?* Sure, each robot was worth a certain amount of points that added up to his total, but still. To reach that high a number…he took out *that many?*

"You did well, Midoriya!" All Might says, flashing him a thumbs-up. *"Also, for the record, I wasn't one of the teachers who graded you, so there was no favoritism involved! You know what that means, Midoriya?"*

All Might's smile grows, if that's even possible.

"You did this on your own, my boy. This is because of your own efforts and hard work."

Izuku can't believe this is happening. All his life, this has been his dream, his goal, the thing he's wanted more than anything else in the world. And now... *now...*

"Come along, Young Midoriya," All Might's projection goes on, and he holds out a hand dramatically. *"This...is your hero academia!"*

Tears roll down his face, and Izuku nods feverishly, rubbing his eyes with the backs of his hands. The projection cuts shortly thereafter, and Izuku stands there, staring at the wall.

Three seconds pass.

"YES!" he shrieks, leaping into the air and fist-bumping nothing. *"I DID IT! I DID IT! WHOOHOO!"*

"Izuku!?" There's frantic banging on his bedroom door. Mom. "Are you alright!? What happened!?"

Izuku laughs giddily, then rushes to open the door. He swings it open and stands there, panting but beaming at his mother. The look on his face must be enough confirmation, because her eyes widen, and this huge smile breaks over her face.

"Izuku!" she cries, and she throws her arms around him, and he hugs her back excitedly, still laughing and beaming and completely beside himself.

He's done it.

This coming school year, he'll be an official student of U.A. High.

That same night, Toshinori receives a text from the kid.

Izuku Midoriya
wehakjsdwejiosadk

Toshinori
I take it the letter arrived, then. :)

Izuku Midoriya
WHEAKJsdjOWEKALSd

Toshinori
That's a yes?

Izuku Midoriya
AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH

Toshinori
Alright, definitely a yes.
Congrats, kiddo!

Izuku Midoriya
:D :D :D :D :D

Toshinori
Anyway, how are you?

Izuku Midoriya
IM SCREAMING

Toshinori
Yep, I bet. I'm proud of you! :)

Izuku Midoriya
AAAAAHHHHHH

Toshinori
Sorry to change the subject,
but can you meet me at Dagobah?

Izuku Midoriya
YES
ON MY WAY
:D :D :D

Toshinori slips his phone into his pocket and raises his head towards the clear horizon. There's a couple sitting at the edge of the dock, and dock that had only recently been put there. Having Izuku clear the beach as part of his training had been mainly because it was a convenient way for Izuku to build muscle, but also, thanks to that, the citizens can now *enjoy* the beach, and that's an added bonus.

Toshinori takes in a breath. He remembers recording Izuku's acceptance letter at U.A., and earlier than that, hearing word from the principal that the boy had been accepted with an outstanding performance at the exam. Sixty rescue points and seventy-nine combat points. Toshinori can't help the pride he feels hearing those numbers. His protege is truly an incredible kid.

“Whatcha doin’?”

Toshinori answers without thinking. “Oh, nothing much, just lost in th--”

And then he thinks about it.

He whirls around with an indistinguishable shout of something; Izuku lets out a small shriek, startled by Toshinori’s reaction. His eyes are bright and owlish, like always, and Toshinori finds himself wondering how on *earth* he hadn’t noticed Izuku standing next to him until now.

“Midoriya!?” Toshinori breathes. “What-- *how--!”*

“I’m sorry!” Izuku says quickly, waving his hands back and forth. “I-I didn’t mean to freak you out again--!”

“How long have you been there!?” Toshinori gasps, willing his heart to return to normal tempo.

“I-I, um, t-two minutes m-maybe?”

“Two minutes!?”

“I-I’m sorry, I-I’ll let you know I’m here next time! I just…” The boy stops, looking away and twiddling his thumbs. “You looked like you were thinking about something, so...I didn’t want to interrupt…”

Toshinori inhales deeply, finally getting over most of the shock. He really, *really* should stop being surprised by this boy...

“Ahh, well…” Toshinori holds out a hand. Izuku blinks at him, and it’s only now that Toshinori realizes the boy’s eyes glow softly in the darkness. Like glow sticks that’ve been cracked for a few hours. “Congrats on getting accepted into U.A., kid.”

This cheers Izuku up immediately, and he beams, accepting Toshinori’s high-five with more enthusiasm than he probably meant to use. “Thanks!” he says, and Toshinori shakes out his hand to get rid of the sting.

After that, they discuss One For All. Izuku tells him what it was like using the Quirk for the first time--he compares it to a *microwave,* good *lord* this child--and Toshinori explains that, yes, for now, whenever Izuku uses One For All, chances are he’ll break his bones.

“But,” Toshinori adds, when Izuku’s shoulders slump in

disappointment, “the more you train your body, the better vessel you will become. Don’t be discouraged, my boy. You’ll be able to use this power without harming yourself before you even know it.”

Izuku perks up again at that, and he beams.

Kacchan isn’t happy. And, of course, he usually isn’t, when it comes to Izuku's success in life, but...

Kacchan slams him against the wall of an alley by Izuku’s school; Izuku’s sharp cry of shock is muffled by his own sharp inhale as the back of his head hits the wall and hands pin him there by his shoulders.

“I told you not to go to U.A.,” Kacchan snarls in his face. “You remember me telling you that, don’t you? *Don’t you, Deku?”*

Izuku swallows thicky. “I remember,” he says. His knees are shaking. Every bone in his body--or, rather, his spirit longing to be free--screams *run, run, run, run, run,* and Izuku feels a familiar tug at his chest, whether or not he’s allowing it.

“You wanna run again, is that it?” Kacchan’s voice brings him back into reality, and Izuku stares at him with wide eyes. “You just wanna keep running, instead of facing me head on,” Kacchan continues, eyes narrowed. “You’ve always been like that, though. You’ve always been a coward. You and that coward’s Quirk.”

He’s so close, and Izuku’s shoulders, where Kacchan is holding him, are burning. It stings. It *hurts.* Not nearly as much as Kacchan’s words, but even so.

Kacchan slams him up against the wall again, harder this time, and Izuku chokes, trying not to cry.

“Answer me, Deku.”

Izuku says nothing.

Kacchan grits his teeth and throws himself back, his hands dropping from Izuku’s shoulders, and Izuku sucks in a sharp, shaky breath, finally able to breathe again. Some of the tension in his chest eases; he doesn’t feel the suffocating urge to flee anymore.

“If you know what’s best for you,” Kacchan growls, “you’ll tell U.A.

you won't be attending. What makes you think they'll want you in the school with that freaky Quirk, anyway? After all, you're not human."

Izuku rubs his shoulder, and Kacchan's next words hit him like a sack of bricks.

"You're a *monster."*

He leaves Izuku behind, and as soon as he's gone, Izuku slides to the ground and cries.

Honestly, Izuku can take a lot. A whole lot. He can take punches and burns and insults.

But not that. Never that. No matter what happens, those words will always feel like icy daggers in his heart.

Izuku doesn't tell his mother about Kacchan cornering him this time, but he decides that if Kacchan does it again, he will.

Kacchan doesn't do it again.

Izuku has already dissociated thrice since waking up, and he hasn't even left the house yet.

"Izuku, you *really need to stop that,"* Mom says, putting her head in her hands. "I know you're nervous, but...could you *please…?"*

"Nervous" seems like an understatement. Izuku is *terrified.* It's the first day of the school year, his first day as an official student of U.A. High, and he's more scared than he's ever been before in his life.

"I-I know, s-sorry," Izuku says, running his fingers through his hair. His hands are shaking. "It's just t-today's the day and I've been waiting for this for so long and I'm so nervous and I don't know what's--"

His mother's fingers curl around his wrist, not tight enough to hurt, but tight enough to keep him grounded in reality. When he looks at her, her eyes bear into his.

"Izuku. Calm down."

"Okay." Izuku's voice is a hoarse squeak, and he's not actually sure his

mother can understand him. She lets him go, and he grabs his backpack off a dining chair and swings it over his shoulder. “I’m heading out now, Mom, bye!”

“I-Izuku, wait.”

He looks at her over his shoulder, hand outstretched towards the doorknob. “Ahh, I’m...I-I’m kind of in a hurry…”

“I’m proud of you, Izuku.”

Izuku blinks, and Mom pauses, glancing down at the floor for a few moments. When she raises her head again, she’s smiling, although shakily.

“I...I-I know I’m...overprotective of you sometimes,” she says, “but...I’m really, truly proud of you. Even after everything, after Katsuki…” She stops, then shakes her head. “You haven’t given up, and...I think that’s brave of you. You’re going to be an amazing hero.”

Izuku blinks again, but then, he smiles. “Thanks, Mom.”

She hugs him shortly, and then he heads off for the train station.

Finding Classroom 1-A once he’s in the building is easy enough. The classroom has a huge, towering door at least three times his height, with a red *A* painted from top to bottom. It’s nearly impossible to miss.

However, finding the courage to actually *open* said door is an entirely different matter.

Izuku takes in a breath. *Don’t be nervous. It’s fine. You trained for this. It’s going to be alright.*

He reaches out and grasps the handle. An image of Kacchan and the boy with glasses he’d upset at the entrance exam pop into his mind’s eye, and he swallows thickly.

Please don’t be any of the scary people, please don’t be any of the scary people, please don’t be any of the scary people--

He opens the door.

“--wrong to put your feet on the desk!” the kid with the glasses is yelling, slicing the air with his hands as though for emphasis. “Don’t

you think it's disrespectful of our senpais and the people who made the desk!?"

Kacchan smirks at him. He makes no move to take his feet off the desk.

Izuku watches the scene, and a small part of him dies on the inside.

Wellp. Guess I'll die, then, he thinks, but he doesn't. Collapsing in front of these people won't solve anything. *Maybe if I slide past them they'll just ignore me…*

That's something he's always been good at: being ignored. Whether or not he means to be, sometimes. He's been told by a fair amount of people that he has no presence whatsoever. Maybe it's a side-effect of his Quirk. He's never known.

He moves across the room. The rest of who he assumes are his new classmates don't give him so much as a second glance, chatting and talking with one another, introducing themselves, the likes. It's a good thing.

Izuku almost makes it to the back of the room without incident.

And then, an elbow slams into the back of his head, and he stumbles forward with a pained yelp.

"Oh, crap!"

A hand reaches out, grabbing his forearm and holding him steady. Izuku turns, absentmindedly rubbing the new bruise on the back of his head.

"I'm so sorry, dude!" says the offender--he has bright red, spiky hair, and he looks caught somewhere between concern and embarrassment. "I didn't know you were there, I'm sorry. You okay?"

Izuku nods immediately. "I'm…I'm fine," he says, and he laughs shakily. "Sorry, it's my fault. I should've been more careful. I've been told I don't have any presence, so, I mean…it's more my fault than yours."

The kid sighs. "Still, though," he says, "I'm sorry. *Not* the kind of first impression I wanted to make. Anyway, I'm Kirishima!" At this, he jabs both thumbs at his chest proudly. "I hope we can still be friends, even though I smacked ya."

“T-That’s fine!” Izuku says, the word *friends* lingering in the forefront of his mind for an extra moment. It’s a term he isn’t quite familiar with. “M-My name is Midoriya. It’s nice to meet you!”

“Nice to meet you t--wait.” Kirishima stops, and his eyes go wide. *“You’re* Midoriya!?”

Izuku takes a step backwards. *That’s weird,* he thinks, *does he know who I am...? I’ve never seen him before…*

“Umm…” Izuku gives a nervous smile, hoping it doesn’t look as forced as it feels. “...Yes...?”

“DUDE!” Kirishima starts forward, grinning even wider than before, which just confuses Izuku all over again. “You’re the guy who came first in the entrance exam!”

Izuku’s train of thought derails. “I’m the what now.”

“Man, sorry, I’m just really surprised!” Kirishima goes on animatedly, smacking himself on the forehead. “I wasn’t expecting it to be someone like you! N-Not that, you know, it’s a *bad* thing, I just wasn’t expecting someone with such little presence to be so fricking *tough!”*

There’s...there’s something here. Something Izuku isn’t getting. *“You say what?”*

“O-Oh, you’re here!”

The conversation stops, and Kirishima and Izuku turn. The nice girl from earlier bounces up to them, a cheerful smile on her face.

“You got in!” the girl says to Izuku, and her smile is so bright it almost hurts his eyes. “That’s great! You were so awesome when you blew that robot away! It was like…” She swings her fist through the air; Kirishima ducks beneath it. “Boom, and pow! It was so cool!”

Heat rises to Izuku’s cheeks, and he laughs shakily. “Thanks for breaking the fall for me,” he says. “Hitting the pavement like that probably would’ve left a couple scratches…”

If, by a couple scratches, you mean death, a part of him chirps. He ignores it.

The girl shakes her head. “It’s the least I can do after you saved me!” she answers, like it’s obvious, and Izuku’s blushing and fidgeting

again. “Anyway, I’m Uraraka Ochako! It’s nice to meet you!”

“You’re all too noisy. Stop wasting time and sit down.”

Izuku, the girl, and Kirishima turn.

Izuku’s first impression of Aizawa Shouta is not a good one.

Their homeroom teacher seems...cold. And maybe that’s exactly what he is. That’s what he *seems,* anyway, just from watching him and listening to him. For the life of him, Izuku has no idea what to expect.

He certainly doesn’t expect being shunted outside with his new classmates for a Quirk assessment test on the very first day of school.

There’s no “welcome” ceremony, no introduction to the kinds of things they’ll be doing during the school year; all they get is a “Follow me” from Aizawa, and then, they’re marching down the hall, all twenty of them, not really walking in any specific kind of order.

Izuku can’t help but feel nervous, almost nervous enough to zip right back out of his body and go hide somewhere. Kirishima and the nice girl, Uraraka, are further up ahead, and he takes up the rear to avoid awkwardness--and people bumping into him, due to the whole “lack of presence” thing and whatnot.

He follows everyone outside.

It’s a Quirk apprehension test, apparently, which is just. *Brilliant.* Izuku has one Quirk that literally explodes his bones and another Quirk that drops him dead.

Whoopty-do, Izuku thinks. *This is how it ends, isn’t it.*

Aizawa gives Kacchan a baseball and has him stand in the center of a circle spray painted onto the dirt. A ball-throw. Simple enough, Izuku thinks. Surely there’s something he can do--

With a loud shriek of *“DIE!!”* Kacchan hurls the ball into the air, sending explosions behind it. The ball soars, soars, soars--and then disappears.

Izuku’s heart drops to his stomach.

Well, then.

“Also, I didn’t mention this before,” Aizawa says, turning towards the group again, “but whoever comes last in this Quirk apprehension test will be expelled due to lack of potential.”

Izuku’s muscles go rigid.

WELL, THEN.

“Dissociation” is a pretty useless Quirk when it comes to apprehension tests. It doesn’t grant Izuku superhuman strength, nor does it boost his body in any way; he can only glide as a ghost as fast as he can run as a human, and the same applies for his strength (when he interacts with the physical world, that is).

The only thing Izuku thinks he stands a chance at is the ball throw. If he drops his body and focuses his hands, he can carry the ball as far as he pleases. Sure, it’s not how he wants to introduce his Quirk to his classmates--after all, he’d really like to break his habit of dropping dead in front of people as a first impression--but he needs to get a good score. He can’t afford to come in last and get expelled.

Aizawa hands him the ball, and he moves to stand in the circle. Everyone else has already gone, and most of them have impressive results. Izuku stands there for a long moment, then takes a deep breath, a familiar tug at his chest. He shuts his eyes for a moment, breathes, then--

“What the heck kind of Quirk is that!? It’s scary!”

Izuku’s eyes snap open, his spirit grounding itself in his body a second before leaving. He glances over his shoulder; Uraraka waves cheerily at him, and Kirishima gives him an encouraging thumbs up.

“Is he even human? That’s a really weird Quirk.”

“Creepy! You’re creepy!”

“He always sneaks up on me. I can never tell when he’s there.”

“That’s pretty scary.”

“I don’t like it.”

“Anytime now, Midoriya,” Aizawa deadpans, and Izuku’s head whips around towards him. “We don’t have all day.”

“S-Sorry,” Izuku says, straightening up again. His shoulders are tense, and his spirit has no plans to leave his body. He looks down at the ball, then raises his head towards the air.

Well…

One For All surges through his skin, hot like fire, and he pulls back his arm.

…I just won’t use it, then.

Toshinori knows something is wrong the moment Izuku hesitates.

He’s been watching the Quirk apprehension test from the sidelines ever since the beginning, so far unseen and unheard. This year’s batch of heroes looks especially promising with a few small exceptions; for the most part, they all show to have a good handle on their Quirks and know how to utilize them to their full potential.

And then there’s the ball throw.

And then there’s Izuku.

Up until now, Izuku hasn’t been able to use “dissociation” to help whatsoever in the test, which makes sense. But now, with the ball throw, Izuku has a chance. He can show everyone what he can do. Sure, Toshinori hates watching the kid drop like a marionette with its strings suddenly cut, and he wishes someone would catch him, but he doesn’t intervene. This is the boy’s moment.

He watches. Watches Izuku step into the circle. Watches the boy close his eyes for a moment in concentration.

But he doesn’t do it. Izuku’s eyes snap open suddenly, like he’s been hurt, and he looks around. A few of his classmates wave at him and smile, but he doesn’t react.

And then, he uses One For All. Granted, Aizawa stops him at first and tells him that if all he can do is break himself, then he may as well stop while he’s ahead, and Izuku, of course, proves him wrong, pouring One For All into his fingertip and firing off the ball that way.

He looks way too proud of himself, and he grins at Aizawa through the pain of his broken finger. Aizawa actually seems impressed, which is definitely a rarity for him.

But something is wrong. Toshinori has known Izuku for almost a full year now, and he knows something is wrong.

He makes a mental note to approach the boy as soon as he can find a moment alone with him; for whatever reason, Izuku doesn't seem ready to share his Quirk with his classmates just yet.

A logical ruse.

Of course. Of-freaking- *course.* It didn't make sense that U.A. would expel students on the first day, anyway. When Izuku lands last in the Quirk apprehension test, like he knew he would from the get go, all he gets from Aizawa is a grin and an, "It was a logical ruse to deceive you into doing your best."

Most of the students take it well. There's some shock at the betrayal at first, sure, but then it's just relief. However, the boy with glasses--Izuku now knows his name is Iida--does not take it nearly as well.

"A logical ruse," Iida says absentmindedly as they leave the school building, ready to head home. "I can't say I agree with that mindset. Our trust in him is bound to waver if he keeps this up--"

"Hey! You two! Wait for me!"

Izuku and Iida turn, stop; Uraraka sprints towards them, beaming brightly.

"Ahh, Infinity Girl," Iida greets once she catches up. "You did wonderfully at the ball throw. Your name is Uraraka, correct?"

The girl nods eagerly. "And you're Iida," she says, pointing to him, "and you're--" her finger moves to Izuku, "--Deku!"

Izuku blanches. "...N-No, not actually…"

"Huh?" Uraraka blinks in confusion. "But the loud, angry boy from earlier--he called you Deku, didn't he?"

"I-It's just…" Izuku shifts his weight. "It's an insult. He calls me that to make fun of me. My real name is Midoriya Izuku."

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" Uraraka waves her hands back and forth, looking appalled. "I-I shouldn't have assumed like that, that was wrong. But, actually…" Uraraka pauses for a moment or two, and then, she beams. "I actually kind of like 'Deku'!"

Izuku blinks. So does Iida. “What?” they say in unison.

“I like Deku!” Uraraka goes on, smiling. “It gives off the feeling of, ‘This is impossible, but I’m going to do it anyway!’ It’d be a great hero name, don’t you think? Plus, I think it’s kind of cute!”

Wellp.

WELLP.

“Deku it is, then!” Izuku squeaks. His voice is an octave higher than what should be possible for a fifteen year old.

“MIDORIYA!?” Iida whirls around, looking a mixture of shocked, confused, and horrified. “Weren’t you just saying…that it’s an *insult!? Why* would you--!?”

“S-Sorry, today’s been crazy,” Izuku says, burying his face in his hands. “I’m not in my right frame of mind. Y-You can call me Deku if you want, though, Uraraka-san…”

“Thanks!” Uraraka says, looking much too excited. “It’ll be your nickname, then! Deku!”

Iida has a few more complaints regarding it, but in the end, he trails off and lets it be, once he’s sure Izuku doesn’t have a problem with it. It’s nice, Izuku thinks, to have a positive meaning attached to the once insult.

Maybe “Deku” can be the name of a hero after all.

All Might
I’d like to talk with you about something.
It’s about your Quirk.
Not One For All, the other one.
Do you have a second?

Izuku does not want to talk about dissociate. Does not want to *think* about dissociate. Sometimes he’s fine talking about it. Sometimes he *enjoys* talking about it. He actually has a journal specifically set aside for analyzing and documenting his Quirk, assessing what it can and can’t do.

But right now, he doesn’t want to talk about it. Or think about it.

He sends a message.

Izuku Midoriya
Could we talk later?
Now's not the best time for me.

It's not a lie. Now *isn't* a good time.

All Might's response comes a few seconds later, and Izuku feels almost bad about turning him down

All Might
Alright, kiddo. See you tomorrow.

And then, a second later--

All Might
Also, I'm always available if you need someone to talk to.

If *that* doesn't give Izuku one hell of a guilt trip, nothing will, and he falls asleep feeling like his chest is full of lead.

The next time he sees All Might is during Hero Basic Training at school the next day. The hero is his usual self, of course, as the students line up inside one of the training cities and prepare for the lesson. All Might gives Izuku a lingering glance *(concern,* Izuku thinks), but that's it.

The students are wearing their hero costumes for the first time; Izuku's was made for him by his mother, with only a few exceptions. He'd asked the support group for something protective for his skull, and they ended up making him a biker-helmet-like thing, designed to match the teal of his jumpsuit. The helmet isn't bulky at all; considering what it is, it's extremely lightweight. If ever he needs to "drop" on short notice in a dangerous situation, it'll keep concussions off the list of injuries he can get.

Today's training seems fairly simple: two teams made up of two people each will be decided at random. The "villain" team has to guard a (paper-mache) nuclear weapon inside a multi-floor labyrinth of a building, and the "hero" team has to infiltrate the building successfully, find the weapon, and either immobilize the villains with capture tape or secure the weapon.

Seems simple enough, Izuku thinks, as All Might reaches into two separate boxes for the drawing; one box is labeled "heroes" and the other box is labeled "villains." *As long as I don't get paired with*

Kacchan, I'll be fine. Besides, the chances of me getting paired with him are pretty slim--

"And we have our teams!" All Might says. "The hero team, Midoriya and Uraraka, versus the villain team, Iida and Bakugou!"

--Are you FREAKING KIDDING ME!?

Izuku glances at Kacchan out of the corner of his eye. Kacchan is glaring in a way that can only be described as "murderous," and Izuku looks away again quickly. Of course he's paired with Kacchan. Of course he is. With his luck, why *wouldn't* he be paired with Kacchan.

"Deku! We're on the same team!" Uraraka says, bouncing up to him. "Let's do our best, okay?"

Izuku smiles just a little at that. At least she's on his team.

"Heroes, you have fifteen minutes to study the floorplan," All Might says, "and villains, you have fifteen minutes to hide your weapon. As for the rest of you, please join me in the viewing room! We will be watching from the sidelines!"

"Good luck, Midoriya!" Kirishima says, grinning and waving, and Izuku raises a hand and waves back.

Izuku is smiling on the outside, sure, but internally, he's screaming.

Izuku and Uraraka infiltrate the building through the window as soon as their fifteen minutes are up.

"We're in," Uraraka whispers, straightening up and looking around. "I don't think they heard us come in."

Izuku nods, turning and looking down one of the hallways. The structure is like a labyrinth, with winding halls and tunnels; he imagines it'd be easy to get lost.

He gestures for Uraraka to follow, and they start down the hallway.

"Do you have any ideas?" Izuku asks once they're well on their way. So far so good; no sign of Iida or Kacchan.

"Not yet," Uraraka says. "But, I imagine they're guarding the weapon. We should find out where that is and overpower them together."

“I don’t think ‘they’re’ guarding it,” Izuku says, peering around the corner, then continuing on when he deems it safe. “I think Iida’s guarding it, and Kac--Bakugou, I mean--he’ll be out here looking for us.”

“Really?” Uraraka asks. There’s a pause. “You sound really sure about that…”

“I am.” There’s a four-way break up ahead; Izuku and Uraraka continue towards it. “He’s going to come after us--” *Me,* a part of him corrects, “--and leave Iida to defend the wea--”

On cue, Kacchan leaps out in front of them from around the corner. There are sparks on his palms; a warm glow encases his hands, and--

“GET DOWN!” Izuku leaps and tackles Uraraka to the ground. Kacchan’s blast misses them by mere inches, shooting down the hall and smashing into the far wall.

Kacchan’s feet hit the ground, and he glares. “Don’t run away, *Deku,”* he snarls.

There’s something very different about being called Deku by Kacchan now.

Before, it’d hurt.

Now it just makes Izuku mad.

“Uraraka, run!” Izuku shouts, springing to his feet and putting his fists in front of his face. “Find Iida and the weapon, then contact me!”

“A-Are you sure!?” Uraraka questions, her voice trembling just a bit. “D-Deku--!”

He looks at her over his shoulder. “I’ll be fine, go--!”

Looking away is a mistake; Kacchan’s fist slams into his stomach, and Izuku stumbles backwards with a cry of shock (and pain). For a moment or two, he can’t breathe.

“Go, Uraraka!” Izuku yells with what breath he has left in his lungs, and this time, Uraraka runs. Her pounding footsteps grow fainter, then fade out entirely.

“You think you can face me alone!?” Kacchan grins and rushes at him, pulling back his fist for another punch. “Don’t make me *laugh--!”*

Izuku's fingers coil around Kacchan's wrist. After that, Izuku grits his teeth and lets instincts and training take over. He tightens his hold on Kacchan's wrist, swings around, yanks him over his shoulder, and decks him back-first into the metal floor below.

Kacchan's cry of shock is swallowed by his sharp inhale of breath, and Izuku scrambles backwards, putting as much distance as he can between him and his once childhood friend. Kacchan gets to his feet slowly, coughing and choking.

He looks at Izuku, eyes narrowed, teeth gritted.

"So you're not running for once," he growls.

Izuku stands his ground. "I'm not running from you. You don't scare me anymore, Ka--" He stops, refrains; "No, you don't scare me anymore, *Bakugou.*"

Kacchan--no, Bakugou--glares at him. "Don't try and act tough now, Deku," he snarls, turning to face him fully. "We all know how big of a coward you are. You and that coward's Quirk."

Izuku swallows hard, teeth gritted behind his lips. The words send sharp arrows through his chest, and he raises his fists again.

"You're wrong," Izuku says. "I'm going to be a hero whether you like it or not."

Bakugou grins. "Is that so?" he questions. "Then why don't you show your new *friends* your Quirk, huh?"

Izuku stops suddenly.

"If I'm wrong, like you say I am," Bakugou goes on, "then show them your power. Show them what you are."

"Creepy!"

"Is he even human? That's a weird Quirk."

"Monster! You're a monster!"

Izuku doesn't wait for Kacchan to move first.

He charges.

Two more punches to the gut from Bakugou and another judo-flip from Izuku later, Izuku is running, tearing down the hall and ignoring the sharp pain of his bruised skin as he does so. He hears Bakugou's voice echoing around him, yelling at him, and Izuku tries to ignore it.

He can't, though. Not when Bakugou's words bounce off the walls and slam into him at every angle.

"DEKU! YOU SAID YOU WEREN'T SCARED, DIDN'T YOU!? THEN COME BACK AND PROVE IT! STOP RUNNING, YOU COWARD!"

But Izuku *does* run.

And as he does, all he can think about is how tired he is of running.

Chapter End Notes

> Wehakjdshajkdw sOMEONE DID ART????? AND IT'S AMAZING??? YOU CAN SEE IT HERE
>
> IT'S GREAT WEHAskjdhWKAJdk.
>
> Also you guys I just wanna say, never be afraid to talk to me/ make art/approach me. I really love you guys and I love interacting with y'all, so it's really great! I've met a couple people who said they were a little intimidated to talk to me, and I want to encourage you not to be intimidated! I love you guys. <3
>
> Also, on the topic of interacting with y'all, I'm REALLY SORRY for not responding to everyone's comments last chapter. I feel horrible about it. But I'm going to do it this chapter, okay? :D I love you guys! :D
>
> Thanks for reading, everyone! :D Until next time, go beyond! PLUS ULTRA!!!

Never Enough

Chapter Summary

"Never Enough" from The Greatest Showman

“I’m trying to hold my breath.
Let it stay this way.
Can’t let this moment end.”

Chapter Notes

Ayyyyy another update! Enjoy! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Something is wrong.

Something is horribly, horribly *wrong.*

Toshinori--or, rather, “All Might” currently--watches the screen in the viewing room with the rest of Class 1-A. On one screen, Bakugou is storming through the facility, fuming. On another screen, Iida and Uraraka are standing across the room from each other, the paper-mache nuclear weapon behind Iida. And, on the final screen, Izuku is running through winding hallways and long corridors.

“Uraraka? Where are you?” Izuku asks--All Might can hear their conversation through his own earpiece. Izuku’s voice is low and breathless; it almost doesn’t sound like him. *“Did you find the weapon?”*

“Umm, yeah, I did,” Uraraka answers--on-screen, Iida takes a step towards her, cackling madly. Perhaps he’s taking his role as a “villain” a bit too seriously. *“Umm, I found Iida, too. He knows I’m here.”*

On-screen, Izuku nods, stumbles on unsteady feet, then keeps running. He’s favoring his right leg.

“Where are you?” Izuku questions.

“Four stories up from where we came in,” comes Uraraka’s answer. *“There’s a small room at the edge of the building on the sixth story, that’s where we are. You’re still on the second floor, aren’t you?”*

Izuku nods again. *“Yeah, I am.”* His voice sounds tight, too tight, and

it's not because he's running. It sounds like he's been crying. *"Hold on, I've got a plan. Stay where you are, alright? Don't let Iida put the capture tape on you."*

"Got it," says Uraraka. The conversation ends, and the two continue their own separate ways.

Something is wrong, though. Izuku isn't acting like himself.

All Might *knows* this kid, spent every day for almost a year *training* with this kid. Izuku is stubborn to a fault, doesn't care about his physical body, analyzes situations before diving into them, and has an excellent sense of his surroundings. There are smaller things, too, like his lack of presence, his glowing eyes, not to mention his Quirk that All Might will never fully understand, but personality wise, All Might knows the ins and outs of this boy.

And right now, he isn't acting like himself. All Might knows that Bakugou's words alone wouldn't be enough to drive Izuku into a corner, wouldn't be enough to drive him to attack Bakugou like he had, then turn tail and flee as soon as he got the chance. There's a deeper problem here, a much, much deeper problem.

And All Might, for the life of him, has no idea what that problem is.

He watches with the rest of the students. Everyone's giving their own commentary; some of them are really invested in the Uraraka vs. Iida situation, but most of them, like All Might, are more concerned with the Izuku vs. Bakugou situation.

"Man, that Bakugou dude's insane," Kaminari says, shaking his head. "Didja see his smile? That was pretty scary."

"I kinda don't want him and Midoriya to run into each other again," says Ashido, "but, on the other hand, I kind of want to see what happens if they do…"

And then, as if on cue, Izuku's and Bakugou's screens merge to form one big picture: they've found each other yet again.

"Ohhh boy." Kirishima grinds his teeth for a moment. "Usually I wouldn't say this, but with Bakugou smiling like…freaking *book it,* Midoriya."

On-screen, Izuku tenses; across from him, Bakugou grins.

"Found ya," Bakugou says, striding towards Izuku slowly, and Izuku takes a step backwards; All Might can't read the look on his face. *"You know, Deku…I was expecting you to last longer, you know? Before you ran off."*

He walks towards Izuku. Izuku steps back once, then twice. His hands are shaking.

"But I guess I shouldn't have expected that, right?" Bakugou grins. Behind All Might, a couple students grimace and wince--they can't hear the audio, but that smile on Bakugou's face spells disaster in bright, bold print.

"You're a coward in the end," Bakugou says, and this time, he stretches out an arm. His gauntlet gleams in the overhead lights. *"Still just as much of a coward as you were when we were little."*

Izuku doesn't say anything.

"By the way, Deku…" Bakugou goes on, *"...you know how my Quirk works, don't you? I sweat nitroglycerin, then ignite it to make explosions."*

Something in All Might's chest clenches. He assumes it's his heart.

Bakugou...what are you--

"Which means," Bakugou goes on, and then that grin is back, wider than ever. *"...If the idiots in the Support Course made this the way I asked them to…then these gauntlets are* full of it."

There's a mic on the desk, and All Might slams on its button; his voice booms over the loudspeakers in the training grounds. "Bakugou, I forbid it!" he shouts. "Do *not* fire! Are you trying to kill him!?"

"It won't kill him if it doesn't hit him!" Bakugou shouts back. His fingers close around the pin on the gauntlet, and he yanks it out.

"Bakugou--!"

All Might's shout is drowned out by Bakugou's blast and Izuku's screams.

Izuku knows he broke something.

Or, possibly, *several* somethings.

He must've blacked out, because he opens his eyes to find himself out of the hallway, crumpled on the floor surrounded by chunks of cement. He raises his head; his helmet must've been blown off by Kacc--no, *Bakugou's* blast, because his bangs hang freely in front of his eyes.

He raises his head. There's a smoking hole in the wall; when the dust settles, Bakugou walks through it, grinning maniacally.

"That," Bakugou says slowly, taking long, even strides towards Izuku, "was *way* more powerful than I expected!"

"Bakugou!"

All Might's voice carries over the loudspeakers, and Bakugou raises his head while Izuku staggers to his feet dazedly. The floor seems to swim beneath him, and he shakes his head to knock the dizziness away. It doesn't help.

"If you use that attack again, the match will end, and your team will lose!" All Might goes on, and Izuku's known the man long enough to tell he's angry. All Might continues, scolding Bakugou for his reckless behavior, and Izuku takes the distraction as a moment to breathe.

"Deku!? Deku! I heard an explosion, are you okay?"

That's Uraraka's voice, sent into his ear through his communicator, and he raises a hand and presses down on the device.

"Y-Yeah, I'm...I'm fine," he says, the tremble of his voice belying his words. "W-Where did you say you were…?"

"Umm, along the far wall of the building, North wing I think," Uraraka chirps back. She sounds worried. *"A-Are you...are you hurt? Y-You sound like you're in pain…"*

He is. "I'm fine," he says, swallowing back the bile in his throat and studying the room for a moment. "H-Hey, Uraraka...I think I'm right underneath you."

"Wait, really?"

Izuku nods. "I have...a plan," he gasps. There's a sharp pain in his chest; his ribs are probably messed up. "It's...i-it's crazy, but...I-I think we can do it. As soon as the floor explodes, grab the weapon."

“The floor…?” She pauses. When her voice comes back, she sounds determined. *“Got it. Good luck, Deku!”*

The transmission cuts, and Izuku is dragged back into the present by Bakugou’s voice.

“Don’t run away this time, Deku,” Bakugou says, as though Izuku doesn’t have three walls on either side of him and the enemy in front of him--and then, Bakugou charges.

Izuku can’t brace himself for it. There’s no time and he has no energy. Pain leaves a fog in his mind. Bakugou grabs his wrist; his fingers burn Izuku’s skin, but Izuku’s cry of shock is cut short when Bakugou yanks him forward, swings around, pulls him over his shoulder--

Wait--

--Izuku is slammed into the floor, back-first. He chokes on his spit, the air in his lungs getting forcefully sucked out of him by the force of the hit.

“Payback from earlier,” Bakugou snarls, and his voice seems to come from very far away. Izuku’s ears are ringing, and his head feels like it’s stuffed with cotton.

Bakugou grabs his arm again and swings, and Izuku shuts down.

Bakugou has no mercy. He grabs Izuku’s arm and swings him around again, slamming him into the floor for a second time. Izuku doesn’t fight back, doesn’t react. He stopped fighting a little while ago, and All Might doesn’t know *why,* but something is wrong. Something is very wrong if Izuku is shutting down at a time like this.

“Just put the capture tape on him!” Kirishima is yelling, his hands buried in his hair. “You don’t have to do this, Bakugou, just *put the capture tape on--* why isn’t he stopping!? *Why won’t he just end it!?”*

“Midoriya isn’t even fighting back anymore!” Kaminari shouts at the screen. “Just cut it out, Bakugou!”

“Put the capture tape on! Even though you’re playing the ‘villain’ here, that’s our *classmate--!”*

“Bakugou, knock it--! Agh, I can’t, this is painful to watch--!”

“Sensei, you have to stop this!” Hagakure’s gloved hands grab his

forearm and shake him, just enough to get his attention. “You can’t let Bakugou--oh, oh no, *why won’t he stop--!”*

All Might snaps out of his shock. His hands fumble for the microphone. “Bakugou--!”

Bakugou slams Izuku into the ground again.

“Bakugou, *stop--!”*

An explosion. A scream. Izuku’s scream.

“BAKUGOU!”

Bakugou is either ignoring him, can’t hear him, or is so into the fight (if you can even call this beatdown a *fight)* to register what All Might’s saying.

All Might turns around. This can’t go on like this, it can’t. At this rate, something really, really horrible is going to happen.

And it isn’t going to happen to Bakugou.

All Might takes two steps. The students part like the Red Sea for him.

“URARAKA, NOW!”

That’s...Izuku’s voice. All Might hasn’t heard that in a while.

He turns back around towards the screen, as do the rest of the students, and they watch. Izuku is still on his back on the floor, and blood trickles down the side of his face, but his fist is retracted at his side.

Bakugou tries to grab him again. Golden tendrils envelop Izuku’s arm, and he throws the punch.

Not at Bakugou, though. At the ceiling.

Bakugou is blasted off his feet, and the surge of wind pressure from Izuku’s punch shoots straight through the roof, blasting out floor after floor and all the windows in the process. Izuku and Bakugou’s screens are full of smoke and dust; on Iida and Uraraka’s screens, the explosion blasts through the floor, and Uraraka springs into action.

She touches a broken pillar, then grabs ahold of it when it’s weightless. With a heroic grin, she cheers, *“Improvised special move:*

Comet Home Run!" and proceeds to swing the pillar like a baseball bat, hitting several pieces of broken cement at Iida.

Iida raises his arms to shield himself, blocking his view of her, and Uraraka takes her chance, tapping herself so she's weightless and throwing herself into the air. She waits until she's above the weapon, then drops; her arms circle around it, and while she beams in triumph, Iida wails in despair.

The smoke and dust clear on the other screens, and All Might refocuses his attention on those instead.

Izuku is unconscious. There's blood beneath his head.

Bakugou is standing a little ways off, staring. His balled fists tremble at his sides, but it's a different than when Izuku's hands were shaking.

Izuku was shaking in fear.

Bakugou is shaking in *fury*.

All Might presses the mic button again. His voice rings out through the building, declaring the hero team the winner.

Victory has never looked so much like defeat.

Toshinori--not "All Might"--rushes for the infirmary literally the moment the lesson is finished.

"All Might" had put on a brave face, as per usual, and finished the lesson with the sixteen remaining students. They'd all done well--he'd told them so at the end of their lesson, right before making a break for the elevator.

There are a number of reasons why he booked it for the elevator, and if anyone on-staff asks why, he'll blame it on his time limit. Honestly, though, it had less to do with that and more to do with Izuku.

Toshinori isn't that worried about the boy's physical well-being; Izuku was unconscious earlier, but not gravely injured, and Toshinori knew Recovery Girl could get straight to work and heal his injuries without much trouble.

No. It's Izuku's *mental* state that Toshinori is worried about, because even though Izuku had thought up a strategy and carried it out in the end, something was definitely wrong. The boy had *shut down* for a

good portion of the lesson, letting Bakugou pummel him into the ground without so much as a word of protest.

And that…

That can't mean anything good.

Toshinori arrives at the infirmary's door shortly thereafter, though a few hours have passed since Izuku was originally shunted away on a stretcher. He stands there for a moment or two to catch his breath, and then, he reaches for the door handle--

"You're too reckless for your own good, I swear!"

"I know, I'm sorry."

Toshinori stops in favor of listening, hand hovering over the handle.

"It's only the second day of school and you've already been in here twice! What's it going to take before you learn to think a little?"

"I'm sorry."

"At this rate, you're going to end up seriously hurting yourself, and I won't always be able to heal you! There's a limit to how much my Quirk can do, you know that!"

"I'm sor--"

"What are you going to do when that happens, boy? How can you save people if all you accomplish is breaking your bod--"

"I SAID I'M SORRY!"

Toshinori feels like someone dropped several ice cubes down his back.

There's…

…There's no way that's Izuku's voice.

Except, it is. That guttural, desperate voice belongs to Izuku.

And it's another reminder that something is very, very wrong here.

When Izuku's voice comes back, he doesn't sound angry anymore. Just broken. "I'm…I-I'm sorry, I-I didn't mean t-to y-yell I just…I-I'm…"

"...It's alright." The bite is gone from Recovery Girl's voice, and she sounds suddenly exhausted. "That was my fault. I shouldn't have shouted like that after what you went through today."

Toshinori takes this as his cue, and he pulls the door open.

Izuku is sitting on the hospital bed, gaze cast downward. He raises his head for just a second at the sound of the door opening, but as soon as he sees who it is, his head snaps back down towards his hands. One arm is bandaged; the other's in a sling. There's gauze around his head and a piece of cotton taped over his cheek.

Recovery Girl hops off her stool and starts towards Toshinori. "Look who finally decides to show up," she greets, if you can really call that a greeting. "Well, I'll leave you to it, then."

She starts to walk past him; and then she says, in a low whisper:

"Talk to him, Toshi. He's hiding something."

Izuku doesn't hear her--he's not meant to--but Toshinori does. The door slides shut behind him, and he's left alone with Izuku.

Izuku doesn't look at him; he keeps his head down, fiddling with the edge of the blanket. His clothes are signed and torn in places, and his hair is more dishevelled than usual.

Toshinori sinks into Recovery Girl's stool by the bed and folds his hands loosely. He waits, for a time, to see if Izuku will say something.

He doesn't.

"Midoriya, my boy...why didn't you use your Quirk?"

Izuku flinches. He's never done that before. When he doesn't say anything, or even so much as turn his head, Toshinori continues.

"And it's not just now," Toshinori says, slowly--he's not entirely certain what to do right now, so he approaches with caution. "Yesterday, the ball throw...you could have used your Quirk then, too, but you used One For All instead."

Izuku doesn't react.

"And now, today," Toshinori continues. "You very well could have used your Quirk to find the weapon and secure it, but in the end, you used One For All, when you *knew* it would hurt you."

Still no reaction from Izuku.

“Midoriya, why would you--”

“Because One For All is a hero’s Quirk,” Izuku chokes out--he doesn’t exactly shout it, but the proclamation isn’t a quiet one, either. “It’s a hero’s power, a-and…‘dissociation’ is j-just...”

“Any Quirk can be a hero’s Quirk, depending on the wielder,” Toshinori cuts him off, afraid of what Izuku was about to say. “It’s not the power that makes a person, it’s the heart behind the power. Your own Quirk, too, Midoriya--”

“It’s a coward’s Quirk!” Izuku *does* shout this time, and Toshinori flinches back in surprise. Izuku’s voice cracks at the end, and tears gleam on his cheeks in the sunlight cast by an open window, but Toshinori can’t see Izuku’s eyes. “It’s a coward’s Quirk, and I-I--”

“You are a lot of things, Midoriya, but a *coward* is not one of them.”

“Yes, I am!” Izuku finally, *finally* looks at him, and his eyes are red and wet and full of pain. And anger. And frustration. The scar on his face is more prominent than ever, and Toshinori feels vaguely like he’s been stabbed in the gut.

“All my life, all I’ve ever done is *run!”* Izuku shrieks. “It’s all I *can* do! And I’m so--” He stops, takes in a long, shuddering breath. “I’m *so tired of running! I don’t want to run anymore!”*

Toshinori doesn’t say anything else. A stunned silence follows as the echo of Izuku’s shout fades from the room.

And then, Izuku’s eyes fill with tears. And terror. “I-I’m sorry,” he stammers desperately. “I-I’m sorry, I-I didn’t mean--I c-can’t--I-I’m sorry, I didn’t mean t-to yell, I-I...I-I *can’t…”*

His voice breaks as the sobs begin, and Izuku finally caves, tears leaving wet splotches on the blanket.

Toshinori, for the life of him, has no idea what to do. It’s not like he hasn’t seen the kid cry before--actually, Izuku cries more than anyone Toshinori’s ever met--but this is different. It’s different this time.

Toshinori rises to his feet and moves to sit on the edge of the bed beside his student. If Izuku notices, he doesn’t react, mostly focused on brushing his tears away. Toshinori hesitates, just for a moment--

and then, he reaches over, awkwardly, and wraps an arm around the boy's shaking shoulders.

Izuku doesn't really react, at least not in the way Toshinori is expecting. Rather than tense or flinch away, the boy leans into the awkward half-hug, and the tears fall faster.

"I'm sorry," Izuku whispers, and his voice breaks all over again. "I-I'm sorry I-I yelled, I-I'm sorry, I-I'm…"

"It's alright, kiddo. It's fine." Toshinori squeezes his shoulders. "I know you didn't mean anything by it, it's okay. You have every right to be upset."

"I'm *frustrated,"* Izuku chokes, "and I-I'm so...I-I'm so *tired* of just...just…"

"I know. You don't have to explain yourself, I get it. It's alright."

"I...I-I didn't even fight back." Izuku drags in a short, shuddering breath. "I-I didn't even *t-try,* I-I just...I just *let him…"*

Him. Toshinori knows exactly who Izuku is talking about. "It's not your fault," Toshinori says. "I told Bakugou to stop, and he refused. What he did to you was wrong."

Izuku chokes and shakes his head. "I-It was a fight," he sobs, "w-we were s-supposed to fight each other--"

"Not like that," Toshinori interrupts. "Bakugou didn't do that so he could *beat* you. He did that because he wanted to *hurt* you. Regardless of the objective of the lesson, what he did was wrong."

He wonders, briefly, how long this has been going on. For how long has Bakugou intentionally tried (and succeeded) to harm Izuku? For how long has it gone unpunished?

He shakes his head. *Now's not the time for that,* he decides. *There will be time for that. There will be. For now…*

"You're not a coward, Midoriya," Toshinori says while Izuku sobs, "and your power isn't a coward's Quirk, either. I hope, someday...you'll realize that you can use this power to *save* people."

Izuku inhales sharply. The tears stop for a brief, brief moment--and then they're back with vigor, and Toshinori squeezes Izuku's shoulder

for lack of better thing to do.

They sit there for a long time.

Eventually, though, Izuku pulls away, and Toshinori lets him go. “S-Sorry,” Izuku says, rubbing his eyes. “S-Sorry, I-I think...I-I’m okay now.”

Toshinori studies his face for a moment. “You sure?”

Izuku nods. “Y-Yeah, t-thanks…” He gives a nervous, shaky kind of laugh. “It...it kinda sucks, y’know...t-that I keep breaking my arms…”

Toshinori blinks. *That’s* certainly a sudden change of subject; maybe it’s intentional. “Yes, it is unfortunate,” he says. “But you’ll…” He stops and looks at Izuku’s face. “...Oh dear.”

He knows that look in Izuku’s eyes. He’s seen it before. Many times.

“Kid…”

“I guess you could say...” Izuku starts.

“Kid, no.”

“...There’s nothing *humerus* about it.”

“Midoriya.”

Izuku snaps a finger-gun at him. *“Ayyyy.”*

Toshinori lets out a long, heaving sigh. “I walked right into that one, didn’t I.”

Izuku gives another shaky laugh. It sounds forced. “I guess,” he says. “Sorry, I...I-I just...wanted a change of subject…”

“That’s fair,” Toshinori says, and he wonders, briefly, if puns are something of a coping method for Izuku. But that’s another conversation for another day. “Anyway, kiddo, get some rest.” Toshinori reaches out and ruffles Izuku’s hair; Izuku blinks at him for a moment. “Recovery Girl’s going to be mad at me again if you don’t.”

“O-Okay…” Izuku says, nodding. “A-And...I-I’m…” He pauses and looks away again. “I-I’m sorry.”

The kid apologizes too much, Toshinori thinks, and he opens his

mouth to say that, no, he doesn't have to apologize, that what happened today wasn't his fault, that Bakugou was wrong, not Izuku...

But Toshinori gets the feeling that saying that won't actually *help* the kid. He knows Izuku is smart, knows that he's blaming himself, not because it's rational, but because that's what he *does.* He shoulders blame like his life depends on it, whether or not it's actually his fault, and Toshinori knows he'll most likely always be like this.

So Toshinori doesn't say any of that.

Instead, the words that come out of his mouth are,

"Hello, Sorry. I'm All Might."

The boy's eyes widen as realization dawns, slowly at first and then all at once, and he *stares* at Toshinori, like he's never seen the man before.

Toshinori snaps gun-fingers at him. *"Ayyyy."*

There's a beat.

And then, Izuku *loses it,* clapping his hand to his head and laughing almost hysterically. The tears are still there, but the laughter is honest and pure, and Toshinori finds himself smiling.

He knows he's inexperienced as a mentor and that he's still learning what it actually means to guide someone...

But at least he can make the kid laugh.

Izuku doesn't know for how long he sleeps, only that when he wakes up, the sun is setting outside the infirmary window.

Izuku blinks and sits up slowly, wincing momentarily when his ribs shift. He'd bruised them, and Recovery Girl had healed them, but even so, to say he's sore would be an understatement.

Recovery Girl already gave him the "okay" to leave; she let him rest for a while, since her Quirk uses a person's stamina to heal injuries, but now, he's ready to head home. He wonders if his mother was contacted about what happened earlier. He hopes not.

He slides off the bed and onto his feet, wincing again. It's not as bad as it could be, though, and he takes that as a good thing. With a slight

heaviness in his chest, he crosses the room, pulls the door open, and steps out into the hallway.

“--hope he’s alright, that was pretty brutal.”

“Yes, indeed. We’ll see him tomorrow, though, I’m sure of it.”

“I hope he’s okay. It was...it was scary.”

And Iida, Kirishima, and Uraraka walk right past him, talking to each other, not even giving him a glance. Izuku watches them walk; Uraraka’s head is down, as is Kirishima’s, and Iida looks more serious than usual, if that’s possible.

Izuku stares, confused, for a long moment.

“Well, I *hope* he comes to school tomorrow,” Kirishima says *(They’re talking about me,* Izuku thinks). “As long as he’s not seriously hurt…”

“I’m fine,” Izuku says.

Kirishima, Iida, and Uraraka let out a short, high-pitched shriek in unison and whirl around to stare at him, the concern chased away by terror.

“MIDORIYA!?”

“DEKU!?”

Izuku winces. “Sorry,” he says quickly. “I-I didn’t mean to scare you guys…”

He really, *really* needs to stop doing that to people...

“Dude, you’re okay, though!” Kirishima says, grinning. “Or…” He stops, his smile melting into concern. “Or...I think you’re okay…?”

Izuku knows how he looks--his eyes are probably still red from crying earlier, and his arm and head are wrapped with gauze; his other arm hangs in a sling. Regardless, though, he smiles, although shakily.

“I’m fine,” he says. “Recovery Girl patched me up, so…”

Unsurprisingly, they don’t seem convinced. “You weren’t seriously hurt, were you, Deku?” Uraraka’s voice shakes, just a little. “I-I’m so sorry I wasn’t there, I could’ve helped you--”

“N-No, it’s fine,” Izuku says at once, holding a hand out to her. “It’s not your fault, I told you to leave. It’s because of you the fight ended as soon as it did. Thank you.”

Uraraka bites her lip, but nods. “I’m glad you’re okay, Deku…”

“Hold on…” Kirishima’s eyes widen, just for a second, like he’s come to a sudden realization. “Midoriya, *wait here,”* he says, very seriously. “I’ll be *right back.”*

And, without another word elsewise, he takes off full-speed down the hallway.

“DON’T RUN!” Iida hollers after him, but Kirishima doesn’t listen, spinning and disappearing around the corner. Iida sighs, but says nothing else on the matter, rather turning back towards Izuku.

“I’m glad you’re alright,” Iida says. “However, I’m quite surprised by Bakugou’s behavior. I don’t see how any aspiring hero could behave like he did…”

“D-Did...d-did he get in trouble?” Izuku asks, genuinely curious--and a little scared, too.

“Yes.” Iida’s answer comes the moment Izuku stops speaking. “Aizawa-sensei pulled him aside for a long talk. He was sent home for the remainder of the day with a note for his parents, and starting tomorrow, he’s on probation.”

Izuku actually feels a little relief at that, and it makes him kind of sad that he does.

“How do you feel, Deku?” Uraraka asks, wringing her hands together. She’s looking at his arm, bandaged and slinged.

“I’m…sore,” Izuku answers. “And...tired, but, honestly...okay.”

“Yes, that makes sense,” Iida says, nodding. “We were just getting ready to head home. We assumed you’d already left, but...it seems we were wrong.”

“I’m glad you’re okay.” Uraraka smiles at him, if just a bit. “Are you...are you going to come to school tomorrow, or…?”

“Recovery Girl said I’ll be fine by then,” Izuku replies. “She kickstarted the healing, so my bones should be okay by tomorrow

morning."

"That's good--"

"I'M BACK!" Kirishima's voice echoes down the hall, and Izuku, Iida, and Uraraka turn. Kirishima sprints across the hallway to them, then stops, resting his hands on his knees and gasping for breath.

"WHY ARE YOU RUNNING!?" Iida questions immediately. "IT'S DANGEROUS, DON'T YOU REALIZE THAT!?"

"Y-Yeah, yeah, sure," Kirishima gasps, then straightens up. "A-Anyway, Midoriya--"

"DON'T CHANGE THE SUBJECT!"

"--Here, this is for you."

He pulls something out of his pocket and hands it to Izuku. Izuku takes it into his hands and stares at it for a long, long moment--Uraraka and Iida crowd around to take a look.

It's a bell.

A small, golden bell, attached to a black choker necklace.

"It's, ahhhh...just so we know you're there," Kirishima explains, rubbing the back of his neck. "We passed Yaoyorozu a little while ago, and getting scared by you a second ago gave me the idea. I asked if she could make one, and..." He gestures vaguely at the bell.

"That's…" Uraraka pauses, and doesn't continue.

"Yeah," Kirishima goes on, this time looking at Izuku. "No offense, buddy, but you've got *absolutely no presence.* It's kinda scary, actually."

"Oh." Izuku looks down at his shoes. "...Sorry, I--"

"Don't look so dejected, man, it's cool," Kirishima says, knocking him on the shoulder hard enough to make him lose his footing, but not his balance. "Everyone's different."

Izuku bites his lip, then raises his head. "You might even say," he says, "we all have our own little *quirks."*

Silence.

“HA!” Kirishima slaps a hand to his head and cackles; Iida groans and buries his face in his hands, and Uraraka pats him on the shoulder comfortingly. “All Might wasn’t kidding, then!” Kirishima whoops. “You *do* like jokes! That’s, um…” Kirishima pauses and smiles embarrassedly. “…The bell thing was supposed to be a joke, kinda…”

Iida looks up and lets out a long sigh. “Kirishima,” he says, “I know you’re trying to help, but don’t you think a *bell* is rather degradin--”

“I like it!” Izuku cuts in suddenly, and everyone jumps collectively. “E-Even though it was kind of a joke, I-I actually really like it!”

Iida looks absolutely *done* with him. “Are you *serious,* Midoriya--”

“I-I mean, practically, it’ll keep me from accidentally sneaking up on people,” Izuku goes on, and Iida buries his head in his hands for a moment, “a-and, also…”

It’s the first time I’ve been given a gift from a friend.

“I think it’s cool!” Izuku says instead.

“Hey, awesome!” Kirishima gives him a thumbs-up. “It was totally a joke at first, but if you like it, I mean, wear it!”

Izuku nods, and Uraraka helps him put it on, snapping it behind his neck, and Izuku is surprised by how perfectly it fits him. He beams, and after a moment or two, his friends (Iida included, even though the smile seems forced), beam back at him.

He walks home with the three of them, and while he does, he thinks of how refreshingly wonderful it is to have friends.

Chapter End Notes

> Hey two updates in two days! Not bad! :D Don't expect that to be consistant, though, because it won't be--I try my best but this stuff takes time wahkjdsa. XD
>
> Anyway, we'll be getting into the USJ in the next chapter, which I'm really excited about! It should be interesting. I have some cool stuff planned that I think y'all will like. ;) Or, I hope you like, anyway. XD
>
> Thank you all so much for your support! I'm responding to comments again this time 'round, so if you wanna say hi, let me

know what you think, the likes, drop me a comment! I love y'all. <3

Anyway, thanks for reading! Until next time, go beyond! PLUS ULTRA!!!!

Shine a Light

Chapter Summary

"Shine a Light" from Heathers

“Deep inside of everyone,
There’s a hot ball of shame
Guilt, regret, anxiety,
Fears we do not name.
But, if we show the ugly parts,
That we hide away,
They turn out to be beautiful,
By the light of the day!”

Chapter Notes

WHAKSJdkjAWHKSJD MORE BEAUTIFUL ART I AM S H O O K E T H AND ALSO VERY VERY GRATEFUL THANK YOU SO MUCH!!!

judgeless-rose

sqooboo

FloatingOnAFeeling

Thanks so much for all your support, you guys! And you fantastic artists out there who totally made my day? This chapter is dedicated to y'all! :D Enjoy! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku bumps into Bakugou on his way to class the next day.

On instinct, he tenses, planting his feet firmly on the ground. Bakugou glares at him, but doesn’t say anything for a time. And then,

“Nice *bell,”* he snarks.

Izuku swallows hard, but doesn’t back down. Not this time. Bakugou is on probation, he won’t try anything if he knows what’s good for him. And if he *does* try anything, he’ll have to answer to Aizawa.

“Thanks,” Izuku says, absentmindedly running his thumb along the smooth metal of the bell. “I got it from a friend.”

Bakugou’s glare darkens, but he doesn’t say anything else. Izuku waits until Bakugou disappears down the hallway before continuing to Class 1-A.

He takes the empty desk in front of Iida, and almost as soon as he sets his backpack on the floor beside his chair, the door slides open again, and in walks Aizawa.

There’s no “good morning,” and Izuku doesn’t think there ever will be. Aizawa doesn’t strike him as much of a morning person. (Or, for that matter, an *any time of day* person.)

Aizawa stacks a few papers on the desk and sets them aside. Izuku sits, straight-backed, and waits for him to begin.

Aizawa raises his head towards the class. “Before we get into today’s lessons, you’ll need to decide on a class representative.”

Izuku blinks. So do the rest of his classmates.

And then, all at once, everyone breaks into rounds of cheers and whoops and yays, and Izuku cups his hands around his ears to block out what noise he can.

For once…and, possibly, *only* for once…

…It’s actually a *normal school activity*.

They decide to take votes to nominate their class rep; it was Iida’s idea to begin with, and they all wrote their names out on the chalkboard and gathered up the votes. Voting like this is probably the best way to go about it; most everyone wants to be class rep, so whoever has more than one vote is obviously the most suited for it.

The most suited for class representative… Izuku thinks, then smiles. *Well…the answer is obvious who I’m going to vote for, then…*

Three votes.

Izuku has three votes.

And none of them are his own.

For a while, he stares at the tally marks on the chalkboard beside his name.

Who the heck…?

He turns in shock to face the rest of the class. Kirishima is whistling and twirling a finger around a spike of hair absentmindedly; Uraraka is fiddling with a pencil; Iida straightens his glasses and doesn't meet Izuku's eyes.

…OH DAGNABBIT YOU GUYS.

"Well, that settles it, then," Aizawa says. "Midoriya is class president, and Yaoyorozu, with two votes, is vice president."

Izuku takes in a deep, deep breath and tries not to scream.

"Y-You guys shouldn't have voted for me," Izuku says over lunch at the cafeteria; he, Iida, Uraraka and Kirishima are sharing a table. "I'm…I'm not suited to be a leader."

"C'mon, dude, that ain't for you to decide." Kirishima points his chopsticks at Izuku with a grin. "Let your followers determine how good or bad of a leader you are."

"B-Believe me, I-I'm not a leader," Izuku insists, shaking his head. "I can't even stand up in front of people without getting jittery, how am I supposed to… *be the class representative?"*

"Oh." Kirishima frowns. "Well, you should've thought of that sooner. You know you have to give the opening speech at the annual Sports Festival, don't you?"

One of Izuku's chopsticks snap between his fingers. "I have to *what."*

"You came first in the entrance exam, Midoriya," says Iida simply, though he seems confused. "That means you make the opening speech for the first year round at the Sports Festival. Did you…not know that?"

Izuku knew it, he'd just never thought about it. "That's it, I'm dead," he says, and he has half a mind to slide out of his chair--and his body, too, actually. "I'm dead. This is the end…"

Kirishima laughs.

Izuku stares at him. “It’s not funny,” he says.

“You’re gonna do fine!” Uraraka says, beaming at him. “It’s gonna ge *great,* just give a nice little encouragement to everyone!”

Izuku looks at her. “Do you...understand... *how much I don’t want to do that?”*

Kirishima laughs harder.

“You guys, I’m serious,” Izuku says--and then, and he *hates* himself for it, he adds, “I’m dead. This is a *grave* situation.”

Kirishima actually falls back out of his chair, cackling madly; a couple students from other tables turn to look in confusion, then go right back to what they’re doing when they’re sure no one’s dying.

“Oh, man, Midoriya, you’re a crack up,” Kirishima says, dragging himself off the floor and back into his seat. “Just say one of your dumb jokes at the opening speech, I’m sure everyone will love ya.”

“Or want to kill me,” Izuku says.

“You can’t kill someone if they’re already dead,” Kirishima says, and for a second, Izuku is off-put by the comment; then he remembers that he’d declared himself “dead” a moment ago. “Seriously though, Midoriya, don’t stress it. You’re gonna be fine.”

“I-I’m...not sure I will,” Izuku says, “but thank you.”

“That reminds me.” Uraraka taps a finger to her chin. “Deku, you had three votes, right? One from me, one from Iida, and one from Kirishima, right?”

Izuku nods, as do Iida and Kirishima.

“So, wait.” Uraraka blinks at him in curiosity. “Who did you vote for, Deku?”

“O-Oh, I voted for Iida,” Izuku answers. “I-I thought, y’know...he just seemed like the right person to me…”

Iida stares at him--and then, he raises a hand over his heart. “I’m honored you think I’m fit to lead the class, Midoriya,” Iida says. “However, I voted for you for the exact same reason. You’re going to be an excellent class representative.”

“Y-Yeah…” Izuku isn’t convinced at all. He stares at his broken chopstick sadly. “M-Maybe I--”

Something hits him suddenly, like a wave, and he stops, lurching forward just a bit. That feeling...it’s a tug at his chest, not unlike the feeling he gets when his spirits longs to be free, except--except it feels wrong. Like *something* is wrong.

“Midoriya?” Iida frowns at him. “Midoriya. Are you alright?”

“Yeah,” Izuku says, shaking his head, “just...had a funny feeling, for some reason--”

A loud, whirring siren blares overhead, cutting him off, and he and his friends turn.

“The alarm…?” Kirishima breathes. “Wait, does that mean…?” His eyes find Izuku’s. “What were you saying about a funny feeling?”

Izuku’s eyes are wide. “I have no idea.”

“It doesn’t matter now!” Iida gets to his feet, more serious than ever. “We’re under attack. Everyone, let’s move!”

Izuku, Kirishima and Uraraka get to their feet and follow him as he races from the cafeteria.

They aren’t under attack.

Somehow, a pushy news reporter managed to cross over U.A.’s protective boarder, successfully triggering the alarm. Izuku is glad that’s all it was, but at the same time, he feels an odd sense of...foreboding. Like there’s more to this “mishap” than what meets the eye.

He doesn’t comment, though. He doesn’t see a point. When the incident is resolved and the students finally calm down (a lot of this is due to a stunt Iida pulled in the hallway at the cafeteria), Izuku and his classmates return to Class 1-A.

“Aizawa-sensei?”

Aizawa turns to him. He’s bundled in his sleeping bag in the corner of the room. “What is it, Midoriya?”

“Can I make an announcement real quick?”

Aizawa shrugs. “You’re the class rep, do what you want,” he says. “Just keep it short.”

Izuku nods, thanks him, then steps up behind the desk to face his classmates. They watch him, waiting; Kirishima gives him two thumbs-up in the seat behind Bakugou, and Uraraka beams and waves at him encouragingly.

Izuku takes in a breath.

“I’ve been thinking about this for a little while now,” Izuku says, “and I think Iida should be the class representative instead.”

He hears a collective gasp--a particularly loud one from Iida--but goes on anyway.

“D-Don’t get me wrong, I-I’m...I’m honored to be the class rep,” Izuku says, fiddling restlessly, “but...I-I’m not suited for it. Earlier today, when everyone else was panicking, Iida was able to keep a level-head and calm everyone down. I think that’s a really important thing to be able to do, as a class rep, and me, well…” He pauses and laughs shakily, rubbing the back of his neck.

“...I can be kiiiind of a basketcase.”

This earns a laugh or two from his classmates, and he smiles.

“Well, I don’t have any complaints!” Kaminari says, giving Iida a thumbs-up. “You go, Emergency Exit!”

“Whoo, Iida!”

“Nice goin’, man!”

Iida takes in a breath, then rises to his feet. “Well,” he says, straightening his glasses, “if the class rep nominated me, then who am I to refuse?” He thrusts his hand into the air above his head dramatically and shouts: “Class 1-A! I, Iida Tenya, as class representative, will guide and protect all of you to the best of my abilities!”

“Yeah!”

“Whoop, whoop!”

“Yay!”

“Nice going, Iida!”

“Whoo, Emergency Exit!”

Iida meets Izuku’s eyes and smiles. Izuku beams back at him.

“Ahhh, man, I’m so excited!” Kirishima is saying; they’re on a bus a little later on that same day, heading towards an off-campus training grounds. “Fighting and stuff is great, but rescuing people is really what being a hero’s all about! I can’t wait!”

“I wonder where we’re training,” Asui (no, Tsuyu, she always insists on being called Tsuyu) says absentmindedly, tapping a finger to her chin in thought. “I know it’s off-campus, but is that all we know?”

“It’s gotta be a huge facility, whatever it is,” says Kaminari; they hit a bump in the road, and everyone scrambles to stay in their seats for a moment or two.

“We’ve been driving for a while now,” Ashido moans, looking out the window; city streets and buildings zip by around them. “How much *longer?”*

“Stop whining,” Aizawa cuts in; he’s sitting, arms crossed, in the passenger seat. “We’re still in the city, so we have a long way to go. Stay in your seats.”

Ashido slumps back into her seat like she’s told, but she doesn’t seem happy about it at all.

“Hey, think about it this way!” says Hagakure, her gloves and shoes the only thing the others can see of her. “We have more time to talk and get to know each other now!”

They hit another pothole, and Izuku finds himself thinking they can’t leave the city fast enough. He looks out the window absentmindedly; there’s a dark tunnel farther up ahead, cars and trucks zipping by.

“Well, there isn’t much to talk about, really,” says Kirishima. “I mean, we could talk about our Quirks, but for the most part, we saw all that during training yesterday.”

“That reminds me,” says Kaminari, turning towards Izuku. “You came first in the entrance exam, didn’t you? How’d you manage that if you break your bones whenever you use your Quirk?”

“O-Oh.” Izuku looks away, twiddling his thumbs. “I-I--”

The bus zooms under the tunnel, and they’re engulfed in darkness.

Immediately, everyone starts screaming.

“HOLY *FRICK--”*

“WHAT IN THE--”

“OH MY GOSH--”

(There’s a clash and a clatter in the darkness.)

“I DIDN’T KNOW YOU COULD--”

“WHAT IS THAT!?”

“HOW DO--”

The darkness vanishes as the bus leaves the tunnel behind them, and Izuku winces at his classmates. Ashido and Hagakure are on top of each other (he thinks, it’s hard to tell when one of them is invisible), and Sero is on the floor. The rest of them are staring at Izuku in shock.

“W-What happened?” Izuku asks; in the back of his mind he’s thinking, *what did I do, what did I do, what did I--*

“Dude!” Kaminari exclaims. “I didn’t know your eyes did that!”

“M-My eyes did what…?”

“Glow in the dark!” Sero cuts in, bouncing to his feet. “Did you know they did that, Midoriya!?”

Oh. *Oh.* That’s okay, then. He can brush this off.

“Um, y-yeah,” Izuku answers, “I-I always knew they did, I-I just...usually they’re pretty faint…?”

“They weren’t ‘pretty faint’ a second ago!” Kaminari says. He actually looks impressed now, not terrified, which Izuku assumes is a good thing. “That’s pretty cool, dude! Is it part of your Quirk? Or, like, some kind of a mutation, like Ashido’s skin?”

Huh. Izuku’s never thought of his glowing eyes as a part of a mutation. “M-Maybe?” he says. “I never really thought about it

before…"

The conversation shifts from Izuku's eyes to mutations in general, with the class discussing their own Quirks and "quirks," and Izuku is glad to be out of the spotlight.

It'd been a close call, though, Kaminari asking him how he came first in the entrance exam.

I'll have to tell them eventually, Izuku thinks, turning towards the window again; they're speeding onwards, out of the city towards their destination. *It'd probably be best if I did it before they find out on their own…*

His friends' conversations fade out of his ears, and Izuku watches the world pass by out the window.

The facility is huge.

It's a dome-shaped building located a considerable distance from the city. It isn't really "out in the middle of nowhere," but it cuts it rather close. Izuku follows Aizawa and his classmates inside the building for their Search and Rescue lesson, and all the while, all he can think about is Kaminari's question on the bus. It leaves a bitter taste in his mouth.

He shakes his head. *Focus,* he tells himself. *Focus. There'll be a time and a place to think about that later. Right now...focus on the task at hand.*

All Might isn't here.

He's supposed to be, Izuku knows--Aizawa had told them all earlier--but he isn't.

Aizawa notices, too, and he approaches the only other hero in the facility--the Rescue Hero, Thirteen, known for their work in natural disasters.

"Thirteen," Aizawa says, "where is All Might? He did say he'd be here, didn't he?"

"About that…" Thirteen turns to him, holds up three fingers. "He won't be joining us today, unfortunately. Ran into some trouble earlier."

Three fingers. Three hours. All Might's time limit.

Aizawa shrugs. "Well, it can't be helped, then," he says. "Take it away, Thirteen."

"Gladly." Thirteen turns away from Aizawa and steps towards the students. "Everyone," Thirteen says, "I'm glad you are all here. The most important part of being a hero is not what villains you can fight and defeat, but rather, what people you save. With this training grounds, I mimicked several natural disasters--floods, rockslides, shipwrecks, the likes. I call this facility…"

Thirteen pauses dramatically.

"The Unforeseen Stimulation Joint," Thirteen says, "or USJ for short!"

"Holy crap," Kirishima whispers, eyes wide. "It's literally *Universal Studios Japan."*

Iida elbows him; Kirishima yelps and holds his side.

"Everyone," Thirteen goes on, ignoring Kirishima, "you've only been students for a few days now, but already, you've learned so much about yourselves and your abilities. In Aizawa's Quirk Apprehension test, you learned the heights and limits of your power. In All Might's battle training, you learned what it feels like to use that power on other people."

Izuku catches Bakugou glaring at him for just a brief, brief moment.

"...And now, all of you, as students, people, and aspiring heroes," Thirteen continues, "...I hope you leave here today with the knowledge of how you can use your powers to *save* others."

There's a beat, filled with gasps of awe and bright smiles. "BRAVO!" Iida claps his hands over his head. "BRAVO, THIRTEEN!" The others clap and cheer along with him, and Thirteen takes a bow.

That's kind of like what All Might said yesterday, Izuku thinks, his mentor's words echoing through his head. *I wonder…*

He looks down at his hands.

...Can I actually use my power to--?

And then, there's a yank at his chest. It's not a physical yank, merely a feeling, but it's there and it's dangerous and suddenly a feeling of

dread washes over him, like it did earlier in the cafeteria only this time it's worse, it's so much worse, it's *so much more real--*

"Aizawa-sensei--!"

Izuku lurches forward, and his fingers curl around his teacher's wrist. Aizawa turns to look at him, and slowly, his eyes widen. Izuku wonders what kind of face he's wearing, how panicked he looks, but he puts it out of his mind.

"Something's wrong," Izuku says, and he's almost overwhelmed by that horrible, drowning feeling. "Something's wrong, Sensei, something's--"

On cue, the lightbulbs surrounding the dome of the building flicker and go out. Izuku's heart squeezes in his chest, the feeling worse than ever. The students have stopped cheering; they're staring at a fountain in the middle of the facility, and Izuku follows their gazes.

There's…

...There's something there. A black, gaping *something,* a swirling abyss of *nothingness,* like a black hole.

"Are we already starting…?" Kirishima asks. He sounds curious, but there's no hint of worry in his voice whatsoever. He doesn't know. He has no idea what's going on.

Izuku feels like he's going to be sick. The abyss stretches until it reaches the sides of the facility; and then, from its gaping nothingness march--

No.

Izuku has to hold down his spirit to keep it in his body. It isn't easy. Not when every instinct of his is screaming *run, get away, it's not safe here, it's dangerous, run, run, you'll die, they'll kill you, you'll die--*

There are dozens of them. Literal *dozens* of them, marching from the black abyss with a confidence Izuku didn't know existed in this world.

Villains.

They're *villains.*

Two of them--one covered in detached hands, and another taller, bulkier one that looks more animal than human--hang back, but the

rest of them, the *dozens* of them, plunge forward.

“Stay back!” Aizawa snaps immediately, and Izuku and the others jump. “Thirteen, protect the students!”

Without another word elsewise, Aizawa runs, leaps, and charges at the villains.

Believe in him, Izuku tells himself, even as he’s grinding his teeth and clenching and unclenching his hands at his sides. *Believe in him. He’s strong. He’ll be okay. He’ll make it.*

“Everyone, run!” Thirteen says, ushering the group in the direction of the doors. “Make for the exit, hurry--!”

The abyss of black swirls in front of them, between them and the one exit, and Izuku screeches to a halt, his knees shaking so badly he’s in danger of toppling over.

“Hmm…” The villain studies the group for a long moment, eyes yellow and glowing within the abyss. “This is odd. I do believe All Might was supposed to be here. Is he not? Is it possible...that our information was flawed?”

Information? Flawed? Izuku’s mind is ticking like a bomb. *What does that--*

“No matter,” the villain continues, the abyss stretching and growing. “I still have my duty.”

They’re engulfed by the mist. To his left, Izuku sees Uraraka scream, hands in front of her face to shield herself; to his right, Izuku watches Iida tackle Shouji and Sero to the ground, successfully knocking them out of harm’s way.

Izuku tries to move, tries to get to Uraraka. His eyes are full of darkness, and he can only make out her frame beyond the mist. He hears her scream.

My body won’t--

He’s frozen. His legs won’t move.

--Crap, at a time like this--!

And then he remembers he isn’t a prisoner of his own body.

Literally.

He grits his teeth. He hears screams and shouts around him, and he feels a real tug on his physical body, but not on his spirit. His spirit can do whatever the hell it wants.

He dissociates and makes a dive for Uraraka. He reaches her the moment his body crumples to the floor.

He concentrates all his thoughts on his hands and *shoves,* pushing her back. She shrieks again, this time in surprise, but she's out of the mist now. She's out of the danger. Izuku takes in a breath (or, what he supposes is reminiscent of a breath, considering ghosts don't breathe) of relief, then turns.

The abyss of black is gone, and so are three quarters of Izuku's classmates.

(And his own body, too, but he's more worried about his missing classmates.)

It must be some kind of a warp gate, Izuku thinks, teeth gritted behind his lips. *Which means...this isn't good…*

"Everyone's still in the facility!" Shouji says, one of his appendages stretched into the air above his head. "They're scattered, but they're all still here."

There's a collective sigh of relief from the remaining students--Izuku included--and Thirteen.

The mist villain has gathered back into one spot, blocking the double doors leading outside. "You cannot win this one," the villain says. "You may have avoided getting scattered by my gate, but we will win the war. We have brought with us a weapon...capable of killing All Might."

Izuku's heart leaps into his throat--or, whatever his "heart" is as a ghost, he isn't quite sure that kind of terminology applies to him right now.

They have a way…

...To kill All Might?

Izuku glances over the villain's shoulder at the metal, sliding doors.

The easiest thing to do here is phase through the walls and go to get help, but...he can only move as a ghost as fast as he can physically run, and while his ghost doesn't feel exhaustion or fatigue or shortness of breath, he'd never make it in time.

But…

He looks around. His eyes land on one person in particular.

...Iida can.

This isn't how he wants to reveal his first Quirk to his friends, never in a million years, especially so soon after meeting them, before they can establish trust.

But, even if they hate him after the truth comes out, even if they think he's a monster…

...That's better than watching them die.

Tenya's mind is racing. He doesn't know where the rest of the class is, but they're here, in this facility, which means that they're safe for now. They aren't off somewhere held captive by villains; they're here and they're safe (for now) and they can be saved.

Tenya grits his teeth, staring at the villain and trying to think of just how to counter him. The door is *right there,* so *painstakingly, tauntingly close,* but at the same time, to get there means to face the villain head-on, and Tenya doesn't think he can do that. He knows it's unwise to try.

"Iida."

Tenya jumps; the voice comes from right beside him, but there's nothing there. Just blank, empty space.

"Iida, listen."

Tenya tenses. Now that he thinks about it...he knows that voice. He knows the person *behind* the voice.

"Midoriya?" he says, matching the low, quiet tone of his friend. The warp-gate villain doesn't seem to hear them, which is good; he's not meant to.

"Yeah, it's me," Midoriya says. His voice sounds strained and hollow.

“I-I’m sorry, Iida, I-I…”

Tenya looks around for a moment, but all he sees is blank, empty space. “Midoriya, *where are you?”* Tenya whispers harshly. “What’s going on? What... *what are you doing?”*

Something clutches his wrist suddenly. It’s cold. *“There’s a reason I came first in the entrance exam,”* Midoriya’s voice hisses, and unwillingly, chills go down Tenya’s spine. It’s Midoriya, yes, he knows it’s Midoriya, but...his voice sounds... *icy. Cold.* Not angry or furious, just cold.

And maybe a little bit *dangerous.*

“Iida, listen to me.” Midoriya’s voice brings Tenya back to the present, and he nods, listening. “If I give you an opening...can you run and get help?”

Tenya’s head snaps towards Midoriya’s direction. It’s still just blank, empty space.

“Midoriya, you can’t--you can’t expect me to *leave everyone,”* Tenya says. “If I escape alone, without anyone else--”

The coldness sinks into his wrist further, and it’s only now that Tenya realizes Midoriya must be squeezing him. “If you escape alone,” Midoriya says, “and go get help *right now,* you’re going to save us.”

Tenya grits his teeth. “Midoriya--”

“Do it, Iida.”

He really, *really* does not like the tone of Midoriya’s voice, and he finds himself thinking, *is this really Midoriya? Is this really him?*

“Iida, please, you have to.” The voice is still hollow and dangerous, but now there’s desperation there, too. This is definitely Midoriya. That tone gives it away. “You have to go, Iida. I know you hate it. I-I know...I know how much it *sucks,* but s-sometimes…”

There’s a beat. When Midoriya’s voice comes back, it’s thick and choked. Like he’s crying.

“S-Sometimes...even though you hate it...running is all you can do.”

Tenya grinds his teeth together.

“Midoriya,” he says, “I have...absolutely no idea what’s going on...”

“That’s fair.”

“...But I trust you,” Iida finishes. “I’ll be back soon. I won’t let you down, I won’t let *any* of you down. Please, Midoriya, if you can, please...keep everyone safe. Just while I’m gone. I’ll be back soon.”

Midoriya’s cold, invisible, not-quite-real fingers squeeze his forearm. “Don’t worry,” Midoriya says, in a voice still hollow and low, but determined. “I’m going to protect them, all of them. I promise you, no one is going to die today.”

Chapter End Notes

Gettin' into the crazy stuff now. :')

Things:

-There are things about Izuku's Quirk that we don't know about yet.
-There are things about Izuku's Quirk that *Izuku* doesn't know about yet.
-I'm considering changing the chapter titles to the track names of musicals that I love, but idk. What do you guys think?
-The next chapter is going to be wild.
-If you guys are following Deaf Hero, there'll be an update on that reasonably soon. The chapter's kicking me in the butt right now though.
-*Why the frick doesn't the USJ have an emergency escape exit???*
-You guys are beautiful and amazing and I love you all. <3

Until next time, go beyond! PLUS ULTRA!!!!!

Blow Us All Away

Chapter Summary

"Blow Us All Away" from Hamilton

“Look ‘em in the eye, aim no higher,
Summon all the courage you require.”

Chapter Notes

thERE'S MORE ART?????? YOU GUYS!!!!! :D :D :D :D :D

rip-aizawa

FloatingOnAFeeling

YOU GUYS ARE INCREDIBLE WHAKDSHJDHAWKD THANK YOU SO MUCH!!! ENJOY THE CHAPTER! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku knows he’s running out of time.

For the past thirty seconds, he’s felt a tug and a pull at his spirit, and he wonders where his body actually ended up. Is it drowning? Is it burning? He assumes it’s drowning; the sensation is all too familiar to him, after being nearly drowned by the sludge villain what seems so long ago.

I have to hurry, he thinks, the tug stronger than ever. *If I don’t hurry--*

And then, it stops. The tug and pull and suffocating yanking of his spirit *stop,* and he finally has some breathing room (“breathing room,” even though that term doesn’t really work considering ghosts don’t *breathe).*

It doesn’t take Izuku very long before he realizes what’s happened.

...Someone…

...Someone saved me.

That’s the only thing that makes sense. He doesn’t think his body died; he’s never actually thought about what would happen if his body died without his spirit in it, but he assumes it isn’t good. He believes that

he isn't dead, and he believes that somewhere, wherever his body is, one of his classmates saved him.

He raises his head towards the threat at hand. The warp gate villain is lording over them, confident, like he has all the time in the world, and Izuku narrows his eyes.

I've never used Dissociation to fight before, Izuku thinks, sinking his teeth into his lip. *The only time I ever tried was when I was attacked by the sludge villain, but it didn't work because his body wasn't solid. I wonder…*

"Now then," says the villain, rising to an even greater height. "Our objective here was to kill All Might, but as he isn't *here,* it seems that isn't possible. However...what better way to wound the Symbol of Peace...than to kill the students he's sworn to protect?"

It's odd, Izuku thinks. Being a ghost. Izuku feels fear, but it's different than the fear he feels as a person in his own body. He doesn't feel pain, and even though he *can* feel emotions, like fear and anger and sorrow, he can't fully *click* with them. He can't feel the *extent* of them.

However, right now, faced with this…

...Maybe that's a good thing.

If I concentrate…

Izuku shuts his eyes, focusing all his will into his hands, arms, feet and legs. Interacting with the physical world always has backlash on his body, and he knows this, but he'll take backlash to losing his friends any day.

...Can I actually fight with this power?

He slides up to Iida again. "Iida," he whispers, as loudly as he dares, "are you ready?"

He doesn't want to imagine how confused Iida must be, but his friend doesn't question anything. Yet.

Iida nods. "Ready when you are, Midoriya."

Izuku shuts his eyes, summons his will, then opens them again.

Let's go.

A part of Tenya wants to laugh at the absurdity of this situation, but most of him really just wants to scream. He's leaving his classmates behind, *all nineteen of them,* and not just that, but he's leaving them behind as the *class representative,* when he'd just promised them this morning that he'd protect them all no matter what.

But he can't argue with Midoriya. Not when he uses a tone like that.

"I'll give you an opening," Midoriya is saying; the cold has disappeared from Tenya's forearm, and a part of him feels empty without it. Midoriya's nothing more than a voice in blank, empty space now. "When the doors open, *book it.* Don't think about it, don't think about us, don't look back, just... *run."*

Tenya wants to argue, but doesn't. He nods. "Alright," he says. "I won't let you down, I swear it."

"I know you won't." He can hear a smile in Midoriya's voice, but it's definitely shaky and definitely fake. "You go, Emergency Exit."

Tenya feels something--a rush of air beside him, small and cold but *there*-- and then it's gone. Midoriya is gone.

Midoriya… Tenya grits his teeth. *Whatever you do, don't do anything crazy, please...*

A deep chuckle brings Tenya back to the villain before them, and he turns, fists clenching and unclenching at his sides.

"Foolish children," the villain says, rising to a greater height and towering over them. His voice is almost *refreshing* compared to Midoriya's, and Tenya is angry at himself for thinking so. "You cannot defeat us, and trying is--"

He stops abruptly and lurches forward, his bright, yellow eyes going wider. Tenya and the others stare, shock slowly replacing horror.

"What…?" The villain says exactly what Tenya is thinking, and he raises his head. There's a beat; and then, he stops again, this time shuddering back.

"What the hell?" Sero whispers, eyes wide. "What's going on…?"

Midoriya, Tenya thinks, torn between horror and relief. *It's Midoriya. It has to be Midoriya.*

The villain's bright, glowing eyes search the students. "Which one of you is doing that?" he asks. "What are you doing? Stop that--" He shudders back again, shaking his head back and forth. "I said *stop that…"*

"A-Am I the only one who's confused by this," Ashido murmurs, "o-or...or are we all lost?"

"I don't know what's going on, either," Uraraka murmurs back, teeth gritted, eyes wide. They're scared, they're all scared--and Tenya thinks, maybe, he should be a bit more scared himself.

But he isn't. He knows it's Midoriya, and if anyone can buy them time, it's him. Midoriya Izuku, the boy who came first in the U.A. entrance exam, beating out even powerhouses like Bakugou.

The villain turns back to them. He isn't happy. "This is not a game," the villain tells them gravely. "Your lives are on the line, do you really--"

There's a *clang,* and the villain goes *flying.*

Uraraka, Ashido, Sero and Shouji leap backwards in shock; the villain doesn't go flying very *far,* a fair few feet up and away, but it's enough to give the students a moment to breathe.

"What was that?" the villain's voice rings, curious. He swirls in front of the door again and shakes himself for just a moment. "Whichever one of you is doing that, if you value your life, I'd advise you to stop--"

"Funny thing about that, actually…"

It's Midoriya's voice again, cold and icy but definitely him. There's another *clang,* like something slamming against metal, and the villain goes flying again. The students don't flinch this time, just stare.

"...I *don't* value my life."

Midoriya, Tenya thinks, fists balled at his sides. He has no idea what his friend is actually *doing,* but he knows it certainly can't be anything smart. *Are you insane?*

"W-Wait a minute, w-was that…" Uraraka's eyes are wide. "Was that *Deku?"*

No one answers the question; the villain was expecting the hit this time, and he regroups, his body swirling back into place again.

“This is getting tedious,” the villain says. “Please, whoever you are--”

There’s another clang, but he doesn’t go flying this time. It’s more of a knock, actually, like knuckles against metal--

“He has a physical body!”

It’s Midoriya’s voice again, and it’s desperate but authoritative. Like a captain commanding an army.

“He has a physical body! We can beat him, you guys, come on! I’ll cover you!”

The villain’s eyes narrow. “You little *brat--”*

Uraraka is the first to react, running forward. Her eyes are narrowed now, and her balled fists swing back and forth at her sides. “I don’t know what’s going on, Deku,” she says, bringing her hands toward her chest and tapping her fingertips together, “but let’s do this!”

This knocks the rest of the students--Tenya included--out of their daze. They race forward, like-minded: Sero, Shouji, Tenya, Ashido...

“I’ll pin him down!” Sero says, flanking Uraraka and thrusting out his elbows. “C’mon, you guys! We can do this!”

“I’ll wait for an opening!” Thirteen shouts from behind them. “Everyone, be careful! Remember, when it comes down to it, saving your own life is equally important to saving the lives of the people around you!”

“Got it!” Uraraka hollers back, still running.

The mist villain shrinks back, but he doesn’t seem afraid. Merely fed up. “Please, stop this,” the villain says as the students charge. “Do you have *death wishes--”*

An invisible something (some *one)* slams into him. He flies backwards and hits the double doors back-first with a very audible *clang* of metal against metal.

“Why you--” The villain thrashes and struggles, but doesn’t move. *“Let go of me.”*

Nothing changes, though. He's pinned there, unable to move, and Tenya sees what Midoriya meant now; the villain *does* have a physical body, shrouded by mist but completely obvious now. He's being pinned by his physical body to the double doors behind him.

It's Midoriya, Tenya thinks again, and he wonders how many times he's thought that in the past five minutes. *It's Midoriya.*

And Tenya finds himself wondering just what the hell kind of person he's friends with. He finds himself realizing just *why* Midoriya came first in the entrance exam.

"URARAKA, NOW!" It's Midoriya's voice again, desperate, strained--it's definitely him pinning the villain to the wall, then.

Uraraka runs towards the scene. She shivers when she gets close, and her eyes go wide for a moment, but she doesn't falter. She presses her hand flat against the villain's physical, metal body, then leaps backwards.

"Also, for the record!" Midoriya's voice rings out again, and suddenly the villain is yanked away from the wall, not of his own accord. "If you die today--!"

Midoriya--invisible, *what the hell* Midoriya--swings the villain around and launches him up into the air.

"You will NOT be mist!"

A beat.

And then, Sero turns and runs in the direction opposite the door, swinging his tape around. "Was that a *pun!?"* he says, grinning. "You're *definitely* Midoriya, then!" He sends a strip of tape into the air; it latches onto the villain's body, and Sero yanks him further away from the door.

It doesn't take much for the villain to break free, though, and then he's swarming back, he's coming back and he's *angry*--

"Iida! Run!"

Tenya's head snaps in that direction; the double doors are opening. Slowly, painstakingly slowly, but they're opening.

"Go, Iida!" Shouji yells, and he leaps into the air as the mist villain

comes back. His wing-like appendages close around the villain's body and contain him. "Hurry! *Hurry!"*

It's not what Tenya wants to do, but he does it anyway. His engines roar to life, and he makes a mad dash for the growing space between the double doors.

The space is barely big enough for him to squeeze through, but he does. As he passes, he runs through something cold, something *there* but *not there,* and he shivers involuntarily, but doesn't stop.

It's Midoriya, he thinks, and it's reassuring. *It's Midoriya. It's alright.*

He breaks out of the USJ. Sunlight and fresh air have never felt so good.

At the last second, Tenya glances over his shoulder. He can't see Midoriya, but he hears his friend's voice, ringing through his ears like a chainsaw. A cold voice, an icy voice, an authoritative voice.

But also, a voice filled with relief. Midoriya's voice.

"Run, Iida."

The doors slam shut with a resounding *clap,* and Tenya *does* run. He focuses his attention on the road ahead of him and *sprints,* pouring every once of strength and energy into his Quirk. He knows he's leaving his friends and classmates behind, but at the same time, Midoriya is with them.

Nervous laughs and socially anxious Midoriya.

Self-sacrificing, pun-loving Midoriya.

Silent, glowing-eyed Midoriya.

Cold, icy voice Midoriya.

Blank, empty space Midoriya.

Leading them into battle with the authority of a war hero Midoriya.

Midoriya's words ring through his ears: *"Don't worry. I'm going to protect them, all of them. I promise you, no one is going to die today."*

Without meaning to, Tenya smiles to himself.

…You were so adamant that you weren't a leader, but…

…Midoriya…

…You truly are incredible.

He speeds on, leaving the USJ behind him. He doesn't look back once.

"Well." The mist villain studies the group of students before him, the echo of the slamming door ringing through Ochako's ears. "This is problematic. I did not mean to let one of you to escape--"

Thirteen steps forward, hand outstretched. "You made a mistake, attacking us!" the hero says; the small cap on the forefinger of their space suit opens, and a gaping black hole begins to swallow up the villain.

For a few seconds, it looks like it's working.

And then, the villain begins to laugh.

"Thirteen," he says calmly, as though he isn't being swallowed up by a black hole. "Your work as a hero is outstanding. However…you are naive."

"Turn it off!"

Ochako jumps; it's Deku's voice, but it doesn't sound entirely like him. She knows it's him, she *knows* it is, but at the same time--

"Thirteen, turn it off! Something's wrong--!"

A warp gate opens at Thirteen's back and channels Thirteen's black hole there instead. Thirteen lets out a sound somewhere between a choke and a shriek--Ochako watches, frozen, as a part of the hero's suit is torn off, sucked into abyss, and--

It stops abruptly.

The villain flinches back unexpectedly, closing the warp gate, and Thirteen falls to their knees, gasping for breath.

"Thirteen!" Ochako kneels beside the hero, hands hovering over them in concern. "T-Thirteen, are you--"

"I'm alright," Thirteen says in a strained, pained voice. "It stopped in

time. I'm...I'm alright. A few seconds more, though..."

Ochako swallows the lump in her throat and raises her head. She sees the villain, but she knows he isn't the only person there.

Deku...what are you doing…?

The villain raises his head. "This has gone on long enough," he says, towering over the students once again. "Which of you has the wind Quirk?"

"The wind Quirk? Huh."

The villain turns towards the voice. So do Ochako and the others.

"I'm kind of insulted, to be honest." It sounds like Deku, but... "Seriously, if that's what you think of me..."

There's a pause. A long, dramatic pause.

"... *Wind* did I go wrong?"

...No, this is definitely Deku. His voice shakes, though, and Ochako wonders if he's just telling jokes now to try and ward away his own fear. She's not sure how well it works for him, but it works for her. A little bit.

Maybe that's part of it, too. Maybe he's doing it, not just for himself, but for the rest of them. To keep their spirits raised in this time of terror.

"I don't have time for this," the mist villain says with a long, droning sigh. "I will be going now. I have other matters to attend to…"

He folds in on himself and vanishes within his own warp gate.

Across from her, Shouji scoffs. "So he takes off like a coward, then," he says, rising to his feet. "Makes sense."

"You guys!"

Ochako and those around her jump; the voice is so much closer now. Deku's voice.

"Deku?" she calls, not really expecting an answer. She gets one, though; there's something cold on her forearm, and when Deku's voice comes back, it's soft. Hollow and icy, but soft. Quiet.

"...Yeah. It's me."

"Dude, *where?"* Sero looks around, his eyes falling on the blank, empty space beside Ochako. "I mean, I can hear you, but…"

"It's a lot to explain," Deku says, and there's a heaviness to his tone that wasn't there before. "I'm sorry. But, the escape route is clear."

At this, Ochako raises her head. He's right; with the mist villain gone, their escape route is wide open. They can leave now.

Ochako...isn't quite sure what to think about that. On one hand, they can leave--they can make a break for it and leave the villains and this nightmare behind them.

But...the villains don't make up *everyone* they'll be leaving behind...

Thirteen is unconscious now--not gravely injured, but unconscious. There's a long while, a long gap of space before Deku speaks again.

"Uraraka, Ashido, Sero, Shouji...can you...c-can you help Thirteen out of the facility?"

Ochako's head snaps up. "What?"

Deku doesn't answer. Rather, he goes on: "As soon as you're outside, try and get as far away from here as you can. Don't look back, just...just move forward."

"Wait, w-without you?" Ashido bounces up beside Ochako, eyes wide. "What about everyone else? The rest of the class? We can't abandon--"

"I'll make sure they're safe."

There's something in Deku's tone, something dangerous, that makes Ochako believe him instantly. She doesn't even have to physically *see* him to know he's right for a fact. The villains don't stand a chance against someone with a voice like that.

"...Be careful," Ochako says. "R-Remember what Thirteen said. You...you have to think about your own life, too, Deku."

She does *not* like the silence that follows.

"...Yeah," Deku says finally. "I'll remember that."

She doesn't believe him. She has no reason to believe him. She opens

her mouth to say something, but there's a rush of something beside her--something cold, like wind, something there but not there.

And Deku's gone.

She stands there for a moment.

And then, determined, she turns to the others. "You heard him," she says--and doesn't mention the fact that hearing him was *all* they did. "Let's go."

"This freaking *sucks!"* Ejirou elbows a villain in the face, Quirk activated; the villain hits the ground, unconscious, blood pouring from his nose. "We came here to learn how to *save others,* not save *ourselves--!"*

Bakugou fires off an explosion into another villain's face. The villain is on the ground a second later, sprouting at *least* two degree burns. "They're petty villains," Bakugou snarls. "All of them."

Ejirou turns. Around them are about seven villains in total, unconscious and wounded some way or another. "What do you mean?" Ejirou questions.

"They're *weak,"* Bakugou snaps. "It's like they were thrown into the whole 'being a villain' thing *yesterday.* Other than that warp-gate and the other two standing at the front, they're barely even dangerous."

Ejirou frowns. "I mean, *okay,"* he says. "So we should be fine? The others, too? You think they're alright?"

"Like I've got a frickin' clue," Bakugou growls. "If they *can't* fight off these loser villains, they shouldn't be here in the first place."

Ejirou pauses, taking in the unconscious villains around them. Bloodied, burned, broken bones…

"Yo, Bakugou," Ejirou says, "why do you hate Midoriya?"

Bakugou whirls around so quick it's almost frightening. "What the hell did you just say to me?"

"You heard me. Why do you hate Midoriya?"

Ejirou isn't angry--okay, maybe he is, a little bit, when he thinks about the fact that Bakugou is treating these villains the same exact way he

treated Midoriya during battle training--but he is curious. That's something he won't deny.

"Like, is there something he did to you that made you hate him?" Ejirou goes on when Bakugou doesn't answer. "Is this some kind of a grudge?"

Bakugou glares at him. "Drop it, weird hair. The way I treat Deku is none of your frickin' business."

"I have a *name,"* Ejirou tells him. "And so does Midoriya. Also, what the *hell* makes you think this isn't my business? Midoriya's my friend, Bakugou, and as such, this has *everything* to do with me."

"Shut up," Bakugou snarls.

Ejirou puts up his hands. "I'm not trying to fight you," he says. "Believe me, we have enough to deal with without fighting each other. But I've been thinking about this for a long time now, and--"

"Fricking *drop it, Weird Hair."*

"You really do hate Midoriya, don't you?"

"I said drop it."

"It's like--wait." Ejirou stops. His eyes go wide. "Bakugou, are you--are you *scared* of--"

"SHUT UP!" A blast goes right by Ejirou's head, and he leaps to the side. Bakugou hadn't been aiming for him, so of course it didn't hit him, but still. It was enough to leave his ears ringing.

"Don't bring it up again," Bakugou snarls, and he turns and storms off.

Ejirou watches him go.

"That's weird," he mumbles to himself. "Why the heck would Bakugou be *scared* of him?"

He puts it out of his mind in favor of pursuing his classmate.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAHH!!"

"Be quiet, Mineta," Tsuyu says, pressing two fingers against Midoriya's neck. He's breathing--he hadn't drowned, thank goodness, she'd pulled

him out of the water in time--but it's faint, and she doesn't trust it.

"He's *dead!"* Mineta shrieks instead of listening, burying his hands in his hair(?). His eyes are wide with horror. "He's dead he's dead he's dead he's *dead--!"*

"He's not dead," Tsuyu says, and she says it as confirmation to herself, too. "He still has a pulse. It's faint, but it's there."

It's *very* faint, actually. Faint and sluggish. Tsuyu watches Midoriya's chest rise and fall, shallowly but steadily, and tries not to freak out.

"Did you see him get injured?" Tsuyu asks Mineta.

"I didn't see anything!" Mineta wails. "All I saw was that weird mist-villain's fog! Oh, oh no, he's *dead--!"*

Tsuyu ignores him in favor of looking for injuries on her friend. There's no head wound, but he's breathing too shallowly to just have fainted. There's a problem here, definitely a problem, but...she can't *find anything.*

If he isn't unconscious, Tsuyu thinks, *then what is this--*

And then, Midoriya's eyes snap open, and he knocks heads with her when he shoots upright.

Tsuyu flinches backwards, rubbing her head, but she's too relieved to be upset.

"HE'S ALIVE!" Mineta cheers, rushing forward. "HE'S ALIVE!!"

"Midoriya," Tsuyu says, disliking how pale he is, "are you alr--?"

Midoriya rolls over on his hands and knees and throws up.

Tsuyu reels back in surprise at first, but manages to keep a level-head; she wraps one arm around Midoriya's waist to steady him and rubs his back between his shoulder blades.

Mineta is screaming again, which isn't helping. *"HE'S DYING, HE'S DYING, HE'S DYING--!"*

Tsuyu turns to him for a brief moment. "Mineta."

"YES!?"

“Shut up.”

Mineta doesn’t, though; he just screams again.

“I-I’m fine,” Midoriya rasps, sitting back; Tsuyu lets him go, but keeps a hand on his shoulder.

“You’re not fine,” Tsuyu argues immediately. “You were unconscious a second ago, and now you’re throwing up. Are you hurt?”

Midoriya is already shaking his head before she finishes speaking. “No, I’m not hurt,” he says, pushing himself to his feet; he staggers for a moment, but doesn’t fall. “I’m fine. Just got a little nauseous. Happens all the time.”

“But you were *unconscious,”* Tsuyu tells him. “Getting nauseous like that right after regaining consciousness is a bad sign, Midori-chan.”

“I wasn’t...unconscious, exactly,” Midoriya says. “It’s...it’s hard to explain, please, you just have to--”

Beneath them, the boat lurches; Mineta hits the deck, Tsuyu crouches, and Midoriya grabs the railing. His knuckles are white.

“We’re sinking,” Midoriya says, even though it’s obvious. He looks over the side of the ship, then blanches. “...How long have those villains been there?”

“Since we dragged you out of the water,” Tsuyu answers, filing to stand beside him. She takes a look at his face; pale, drawn, worried...nothing at all like himself. “Midori-chan, maybe you should sit down for a second. You look like you’re going to fall over.”

“There’s no time,” Midoriya says, turning towards her. “I’m fine, I promise.”

And that’s the problem--he *is* fine. There’s no sign of injury, no injury *at all,* and even though he’d been unconscious and puking just a second ago, he *isn’t hurt.*

Tsuyu doesn’t get it. It doesn’t make any *sense.*

“Alright,” Tsuyu says, even though she doesn’t like it. She sets herself in “business” mode and moves to stand beside Midoriya, overlooking the villain-infested waters below. “We should get out of here and try to find the others. They’re probably no better off than we are.”

“The others are fine,” Midoriya says, looking down at the villains in the water. She can almost see the gears turning in his head. “They’re surrounded, like we are, but they’re holding their own.”

“H-How do you know?” Mineta asks.

Midoriya lets out a short, hoarse laugh and rubs the back of his neck. “It’s a long story,” he says. “I’ll explain everything later, for now...let’s focus on clearing the shipwreck zone.”

Tsuyu has no idea what’s going on. She supposes Midoriya has always been a bit... *strange,* if that’s the right word. His lack of presence, his nervous laughs, his glowing eyes, that *scar*…

But--and she doesn’t really know why--she gets the feeling that she can trust him. She can look at his face and tell that he isn’t steering her wrong. She knows that he’s someone she can trust.

She nods. “Tell us what to do,” she says.

Midoriya nods back. “I have an idea,” he says. “It’s probably really, really stupid, and you’re probably going to hate it--”

The boat lurches again. Midoriya almost, *almost* takes the plunge, but grabs at the railing again at the last second. They’re sinking faster now than ever before.

Tsuyu looks at him. “You were saying, Midori-chan?”

“R-Right.” Midoriya straightens up again, eyes gleaming. With tears, because he was just puking his guts up a second ago, but also with determination. “Here’s what we’re gonna do…”

Izuku has never used Dissociation that way for that long before.

He, Tsuyu and Mineta have just cleared the shipwreck zone, leaving a cluster of villains, stuck together by Mineta’s sticky balls, behind them. Izuku’s middle finger and thumb are broken from firing off One For All into the water, but he can deal with that. It isn’t a problem. At least it isn’t his arm.

He still feels sick, though. Remarkably sick. His calves hurt from when he was kicking the mist villain into the air earlier, which is odd, because he’d been a ghost then.

I wonder if any injuries I get as a ghost interacting with the physical world

are transferred onto my physical body, Izuku wonders, wincing as sharp pain twists through his stomach. *If so, I need to be more careful in the future…*

"Midori-chan, what should we do now?" Asu-- *Tsuyu* asks, and she sounds worried. "Don't you think you should sit down now…?"

Izuku shakes his head. "No, I'm fine," he says. "I'm worried about Aizawa-sensei. He charged into the fight earlier, but he can't fight off that many villains all by himself for this long."

"Are you kidding me!?" Mineta questions. "He's *Eraserhead!* He can do *anything!"*

"It's impractical," Izuku cuts in. "Aizawa-sensei is a hero, an *amazing* hero, but he's still a person. He's a human being, and…" His stomach twists and turns, and he swallows back the bile in his throat. "...We all have our limitations."

"So what do you suggest we do?" Tsuyu asks. "We can't get in his way--"

"We're not going to," Izuku says. "I'm thinking, maybe, we can stay on the sidelines and fight off whatever villains come running at him. It's the best way to do this, I think."

And it is. He can't think of any other way--

"Midoriya, look!" Mineta lurches forward suddenly, pointing with one hand and grabbing Izuku's arm with the other. "Look!"

Izuku turns, and so does Tsuyu. The hand-villain has finally stepped into the fray, and he runs at Aizawa. Aizawa dodges; it looks easy; the hand-villain swings at him, grabs his arm; Aizawa's skin on his elbow peels, but he doesn't give up. He yanks away, jerks away, and--

Something yanks at Izuku's chest. A feeling he'd had before. The same feeling he'd had when they stepped into the USJ. The same feeling he'd had a second before the villains showed up.

And it's happening again.

"Stay here," Izuku demands, and he leaps out of the water, onto the shore, and takes off running.

"Midori-chan!" Tsuyu's voice screams back at him, and she sounds

more scared than he's ever heard her, which shocks him, but no, no, *no,* whatever's about to happen here *cannot happen, Izuku can't let it happen, he can't let it happen, no, no, no--*

The villain--the bulky one, the one with animalistic features and crazed, deranged eyes--steps forward. Izuku's feet pound as he runs, as he tries, as he *tries so hard,* but there's too much distance, it's too far, it's too far, *he won't make it--*

The villain's fist comes down on Aizawa's head.

There's a sickening *crack,* then a thump when Aizawa's body crumples to the ground in a bloody, broken heap. Blood pools steadily beneath his head, minimal at first but then there's a lot of it, there's a lot of it, there's *so much of it--*

Izuku screeches to a halt, shoes digging into the dirt and bringing up dust. He stares, eyes wide, feeilng vaguely like he's being strangled. His heart is pounding, and half his stomach is in his throat, and it has nothing to do with the fact that he'd overused his Quirk earlier.

Aizawa-sensei…

Izuku stares. His head feels like it's stuffed with cotton, but he can hear a high-pitched whir. His ears are ringing. His mind is blank. He can't tear his eyes away from the scene in front of him. He can't move. All he can do...is *watch.*

The bulky villain slams his fist down onto Aizawa's arm. There's another sickening crack, and Aizawa lets out a short, guttural shriek of pain. The villain grabs him by the hair and slams him into the ground again, once, then twice, then again--

Stop it.

Izuku's ears are ringing. He feels dizzy. He wants to throw up.

Stop it.

Another crack. Another shriek. Then silence.

Stop it--!

The mist villain appears, swirling by the hand-villain's side. "Shigaraki," the villain reports, and the voice sounds odd in Izuku's ringing ears.

The hand villain, Shigaraki, turns. “What? Did you kill the students?”

“No, but one of them managed to escape the facility. They’re going to get help now.”

“…What did you just say?”

Shigaraki’s hands are trembling at his sides, and Izuku knows it’s out of anger. He’s seen this kind of anger enough times to know exactly what this means.

“Kurogiri…if you weren’t our only way out of here… *I’d kill you now.”*

The warp gate villain doesn’t seem very surprised. Remorseful, maybe, but not surprised. Perhaps this has happened before. “Reinforcements will arrive at any moment now,” he says, voice unbelievably steady. “What should we do?”

There’s a long moment. Shigaraki’s fists clench and unclench over and over, one finger at a time.

And then, he stops. His shoulders slump, and he looks down.

“I see,” he says, facial expression covered by the detached hand on his face. “I guess this is game over for us. All Might isn’t here…which means in the end…our main objective…there’s no possible way…”

He trails off, scratching his neck with two pale, bony fingers.

“…However…even if we can’t kill *him…”*

He turns his head and looks directly at Izuku. His eyes are bloodshot and wide, crazed, almost like the inhuman creature pinning Aizawa down…

The villain smiles. “…We can wound his pride as the Symbol of Peace, can’t we?”

And then, Shigaraki runs.

Towards Izuku.

Izuku is close--maybe ten feet away--and even as Shigaraki closes this short distance between them, all he can do is stare. He knows Shigaraki is running at him, he knows Shigaraki’s Quirk can kill him, he knows he’s in danger--

But he feels nothing.

Nothing at all.

The whole world slows until it's barely moving at all, and Izuku takes in his surroundings with a sudden sense of clarity. Tsuyu is reaching for him. Her shriek of his name rings through his ears, barely distinguishable and full of fear and terror. Shigaraki is reaching out towards him, fingers spread towards Izuku's face, mere inches away now. Behind him, the inhuman monster towers over Aizawa, and blood pools on the ground beneath the hero's head.

Izuku's spirit, his *being,* the person he is, gives a lurch. A thought pierces through his mind like a spear.

I want to save him, he thinks, and absentmindedly, he reaches up, touching the cold metal of the bell around his neck.

I want to save all of them.

Izuku takes in a breath. For some reason, Kirishima's words--a joke at the time, but something he remembers regardless--come back to him. Izuku lowers his hand back to his side, and despite what's going on around him, he feels oddly...detached. Calm.

A realization washes over him as Kirishima's words echo through his mind.

You can't kill someone…

Izuku raises his head and narrows his eyes at Shigaraki.

…Who's already dead.

He drops.

Chapter End Notes

:D

:D :D :D :D :D

You have no idea how long I've been waiting for this arc.
:D :D :D :D :D

The next chapter's gonna be one heck of a wild ride y'all.

:D :D :D :D :D :D :D :D :D :D

THANK YOU ALL SO MUCH FOR YOUR SUPPORT ON THIS STORY!! *fist-bump* I LOVE YOU ALL SO MUCH!! UNTIL NEXT TIME, GO BEYOND! PLUS ULTRA!!!!!!

This Is Me

Chapter Summary

"This Is Me" from The Greatest Showman

“When the sharpest words wanna cut me down,
I’m gonna send a flood, gonna drown ‘em out.
I am brave, I am bruised, I am who I’m meant to be.
This is me.
I’m not scared to be seen, I make no apologies,
This is me.”

Chapter Notes

AWHAKJDSKJDAWD THERE'S MOOOOOOORE:

FloatingOnAFeeling

cocothekitten1

THANK YOU GUYS SO MUCH YOU'RE AMAZING!!!!! :D ENJOY THE CHAPTER! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It’s probably the stupidest thing Izuku has done thus far, and he’s done a lot of stupid things.

Izuku’s body hits the ground, but his ghost doesn’t move and his gaze doesn’t falter. His pain is gone, his stomach isn’t churning anymore, and he leaves as much fear as he can with his physical body.

Shigaraki skids to a halt, staring down at Izuku’s limp, unmoving form. “What…?” Shigaraki questions, unaware that Izuku’s still staring at him as a ghost, still waiting for his time to strike. “Did he...did he seriously *faint?* Are you *kidding me?”*

Izuku grins, if just to trick his own lingering fear, and he concentrates all his energy on his leg and slams his knee into Shigaraki’s stomach.

Shigaraki lets out a choked sound and stumbles backwards, hands moving to cover his mouth. The mist villain--Kurogiri--starts forward, but Shigaraki swings an arm out to stop him.

“Something’s wrong here,” Shigaraki growls. His eyes are on Izuku’s body; Izuku’s ghost hovers over it, unseen. “I’ll take care of this…”

He runs for Izuku’s body. He isn’t expecting it to move.

Well then, Izuku thinks, *guess I’ll just--*

He zooms back into his body, swings around, and kicks Shigaraki in the kneecap.

Shigaraki trips backwards again with a shriek of pain, and Izuku, once more associated with his own body, scrambles off the ground and takes a few steps backwards. His stomach is burning, but that doesn’t matter.

Shigaraki glares at him, hands holding his leg. “You tricked me,” he snarls, his voice a low hiss. “You *tricked me.”*

“Yeah I did,” Izuku says, and he doesn’t like the way his body feels--achy and burning and *afraid.* “I’m a coward, what did you expect me to do? Come at you from the front?”

Shigaraki isn’t happy, this is obvious. Izuku resists the urge to dissociate and keeps his spirit firmly in his body, if just for now. It doesn’t seem like Shigaraki figured out his Quirk yet, which means, as long as he has that...he has an advantage.

“Hey, I’ve got a question,” Izuku says, striding forward. His confidence is a lie, and so is his smile, but he forces himself to keep it up. “Have you ever thought about dropping the whole ‘villain’ thing and becoming, oh, I dunno...a *plumber* instead?”

Shigaraki blinks. “A plumber?”

“Yeah.” Izuku keeps walking, and he grins. “You seem like you’d make a pretty swell *handy-man* to me.”

“...What?” Shigaraki stares at him, like he can’t quite tell what Izuku *is. “...What?”*

“Well, yeah,” Izuku says. He stops walking, leaving about five feet between himself and the villain. “I’ve gotta *hand* it to you, it’s pretty--”

Shigaraki lunges at him, hand outstretched towards Izuku’s face.

Izuku drops his body just a split second before Shigaraki’s fingers

touch him.

Shigaraki flinches, not expecting it a second time.

And Izuku concentrates on his hand, balls his fist, and socks Shigaraki in the face with all his might.

Shigaraki stumbles backwards; the hand on his face goes flying off, and it lands a few feet away. Izuku doesn't quite know what to feel, but he imagines if he was in his own body, he'd feel pretty sick.

Shigaraki turns and grabs the hand off the ground, and Izuku uses this moment to slip back into his body. His stomach burns and churns, but he swallows back the bile in his throat and refuses to throw up. He can't let Shigaraki see any weakness; if he shows weakness he's dead.

He straightens up, just as Shigaraki settles the hand back across his face. "How dare you…" the villain seethes. "How *dare you mock Father…"*

"Father?" Izuku repeats, frowning, ignoring his burning stomach. The longer this goes, the less scared he feels, and even though he doesn't understand, he doesn't complain.

He can fight like this. He can use this power and fight. He can fight like this, if just for now. If just long enough for the reinforcements to arrive. If just long enough to let the others escape.

"So, you have daddy issues?" he says. "Is that what this is? Is that why you attacked us?"

Shigaraki glares at him. Izuku wishes he had his helmet--considering how many times he's going to need to drop in this fight, it'd be really nice to have.

But all he has is his PE gear and a skull he hopes is hard enough to withstand what he's about to do.

"Come on," Izuku says idly, grinning at Shigaraki, "we all have problems. Believe me, whatever you're dealing with, killing people isn't a good coping method."

Shigaraki lunges.

Tsuyu is watching the fight, but she doesn't know what's going on. As Shigaraki lunges, Midoriya *drops,* like a sack of bricks. He *drops,* and

he *lays there,* crumpled in an unmoving heap--but then, as Shigaraki lunges for him, something *hits him.* A tangible thing *hits him,* hits him hard enough to throw him backwards--a blow to the stomach, it looks like.

But there's *nothing there.* Nothing there at *all.*

It's just blank, empty space.

Blank, empty space…

…And Midoriya's lifeless body.

…What…?

"Hey, Shigaraki, that reminds me!"

Shigaraki's legs jerk to the side, torn from underneath him, and he falls and slams into the ground. A second later, Midoriya comes to life again, rising to stand again. He's pale, and his hands are shaking, but he's grinning.

"Why did you attack us?" Midoriya asks.

Shigaraki gets up, slowly. The warp gate villain starts toward him cautiously, but Shigaraki stops him yet again.

"Go away," Shigaraki demands, straightening up and staring Midoriya down. "If anyone's going to take down this insufferable *brat,* it's going to be me."

"Oh, you already think I'm an insufferable brat?" Midoriya asks curiously, cocking his head to one side. He lets out a short, barking laugh, and Tsuyu can't tell whether it's cheerful of fiendish. "Believe me, you ain't seen *nothin'* yet!"

"Burn in *hell!"* Shigaraki yells, throwing himself at him.

"By the way, you never answered my question!" Midoriya rushes forward as well to meet him in battle. He stumbles, but doesn't fall. "You attacked us, right? What for?"

"I attacked U.A.--!" Shigaraki swings an arm; Midoriya drops to the ground, but a second later, he's moving again, kicking Shigaraki's feet out from under him. Shigaraki trips, but doesn't fall; he's expecting it. "--So I could *kill--!"* Shigaraki lunges; Midoriya doesn't drop this time, but he does leap out of the way. He falters upon landing and almost

stumbles. *"--All Might!"*

"So that's it?" Midoriya says. "That's all? But why?"

Shigaraki stops mid-attack, his outstretched arm tensing. "What?"

"Why do you want to kill All Might?" Midoriya asks, and he says it so *calmly* and *collectively* that it's like they're discussing dinner plans, not life and death. "What's your objective, Shigaraki?"

"I want to destroy what I hate," Shigaraki tells him, lowering his hand to his side. "I want to--"

"But why?" Midoriya questions. "Why do you wanna destroy what you hate? Yeah, sure, you hate it, but what are you fighting for? What kind of world are you trying to create? A world *without* All Might? That doesn't make sense by itself."

He's stalling, Tsuyu realizes, and the words leave bile in her throat and ice in her chest. *He's stalling. He's keeping all the attention on him to give everyone time to escape.*

"What the hell are you talking about?" Shigaraki 's eyes are narrowed, and his voice is full of venom. "I want to destroy what I hate, that's *it."*

"That's cute," Midoriya says, "but what are you fighting for?"

Shigaraki falters. He doesn't know how to answer.

"See, I'm fighting for a lot of things," Midoriya goes on. "I'm fighting because I want people to live in a world *without* darkness. I want people to be able to smile and look forward to the future. I'm fighting for the friends I've made, for the people I *love.* So tell me *this,* Shigaraki--!"

Midoriya runs. He's pale, he's shaking, he's *scared.*

And he's charging into battle, *grinning.*

"What are you fighting for, Shigaraki? You say all you want to do is destroy what you hate? *Don't make me laugh!"*

Midoriya throws a punch; Shigaraki dodges and tries to land one of his own, but Midoriya's body drops. Something invisible slams into Shigaraki, and he stumbles backwards; a second later, Midoriya gets up again and lunges.

“My friends, the people at U.A.--we’re all *fighting* for something! *I’m* fighting for something!”

He drops; Shigaraki reaches for his body, but something slams into him and knocks him back. Tsuyu watches, wide-eyed and dumbfounded.

Midori-chan…

Midoriya--real, physical Midoriya, not blank, empty space Midoriya--grabs Shigaraki’s arm.

“I’m fighting because I don’t want to lose the people I love!” Midoriya yells. “I’m fighting because I don’t want to lose *hope!* Against someone like you, who doesn’t know *what* they’re fighting for--!”

Midoriya swings around, yanks his Shigaraki’s arm, pulls him over his shoulder--

“--Of course I’m going to beat you!”

He decks Shigaraki back-first into the ground.

…You’re amazing.

Izuku knows he’s being an idiot. He knows this is stupid, he knows taunting Shigaraki is only going to make things worse for himself.

But he can buy time like this. Iida escaped and is going for help, help that will be here any second now. Until then, Izuku resolves to hold off Shigaraki, to hold off the villains, to at least keep their attention focused on him. Tsuyu and Mineta are close, too close; if the villains decide to go after them instead…

Shigaraki gets to his feet slowly, wincing as he does so, and as soon as his legs are underneath him, he raises his head and straightens up. He doesn’t seem especially angry anymore, but Izuku can feel *something* rolling off him in waves.

It’s not anger anymore.

It’s hatred.

“You know what, I’m sick of you,” Shigaraki snaps. “You keep running your mouth, talking like you know everything…”

“Oh, you mean like you?” Izuku says, trying to keep the waver out of his voice. “You come barrelling in here, guns-blazing, saying you’re gonna kill All Might, and you think *I’m* the one who needs to stop running their mouth?”

“Shut up,” Shigaraki growls, and he turns away. “I’m through dealing with you. Nomu.”

The inhuman creature with bulging eyes and visible brains raises its head. It’s still towering over Aizawa, but it stopped driving him into the ground a while ago.

Shigaraki raises an arm and points a single, bony finger at Izuku.

“Kill him. Make it as painful as you want.”

Izuku has just enough time to stiffen. *Don’t know what I was expecting, but--*

It happens too fast. The creature *moves* too fast. One second, it’s standing over Aizawa--and then the next second Izuku is knocked off his feet, pain searing through his lungs and ribs like hot coals.

He slams back-first into the far wall of the USJ; he feels something snap, and he grits his teeth to keep from crying out. Before he hits the ground, the Nomu is back, it’s *right in front of him,* and it grabs him by the throat and slams him against the wall again.

And then Izuku can’t breathe. He’s vaguely aware of Tsuyu calling his name, Mineta screaming, but that’s it, and it’s very vague. His ribs are messed up; the Nomu is squeezing him, not tight enough to snap his neck, but tight enough to close off his airway.

He doesn’t have the chance to do anything, doesn’t have the chance to think, doesn’t have the chance to dissociate. The Nomu yanks him back away from the wall, then slams him into the ground.

His ribs snap. His ears ring. He hears screaming--maybe it’s him.

It’s like that time with Bakugou. The pain is grounding him in reality too much. He can’t escape. He can’t leave. He can’t dissociate.

He’s *trapped.*

“Kill him. Make it as painful as you want.”

A slow death, then...the Nomu’s going to take its time killing me...

And Izuku hates that, as his mind is dulled with pain and the Nomu drags him up to slam him into the ground once more, the one thing that comes to mind is

I can buy even more time now.

There's a crack. There's a slam. There's a scream.

Tsuyu wants to jerk her head. She wants to shove herself beneath the waves to drown out the scene, but she can't. She can't move, she can't think, she can't turn away. All she can do is…

…Stare.

The Nomu isn't trying to kill him. Not yet. It slams Midoriya into the ground once, then twice, then again. Midoriya is still conscious, somehow, and blood runs down the sides of his face and leaves dark red splotches on the ground.

"I-I can't…" Mineta's voice is soft and choked. He's like Tsuyu, desperate to look away but unable to. "I-I can't...I can't take this. P-Please s-stop...I-I can't…"

Tsuyu can't breathe anymore. Her train of thought derailed the moment the Nomu first attacked Midoriya, and it hasn't gotten back on track yet. She doubts it will.

She can't think, can't move, can't look away. Can't *breathe*--

"Stop." Shigaraki's voice seems to come from far away, even though he's close. The Nomu raises its head towards its master, and Tsuyu watches Shigaraki approach steadily, leisurely, like he has all the time in the world. Midoriya is on the ground, gasping, bleeding, but he's alive, he's *alive,* and the Nomu is standing over him, thick fingers buried in his scalp.

Shigaraki kneels across from them and looks at Midoriya. "This is what happens when you get in our way, brat," he says simply. "Really, I don't see how you could be so *stupid…"*

Blood cascades down the sides of Midoriya's face, but he doesn't back down. He stares at Shigaraki, even though he's obviously in pain, even though there are tears in his eyes.

"I *did it,"* Midoriya chokes, spits, and the words sound like they hurt

to say, “because I’m fighting for something. S-Something that’s *worth* this p-pain.”

The Nomu twists his arm behind his back, and Midoriya winces, snapping his teeth together to keep from screaming. He breathes heavily for a moment, riding out the pain, and then,

“H-Hey, Shigaraki…y-you’re gonna kill me, right? I’m gonna die?”

“Yeah,” Shigaraki snaps, like he couldn’t care less. “Go ahead, say whatever you want. Spew some more heroic bullshit, see where it gets you. It’s not like history’s gonna remember your last words.”

Midoriya looks at him. His eyes are blank and cold and *dead,* and Tsuyu doesn’t think anyone’s ever looked more dangerous.

“I-If you stand for nothing… *what will you fall for?”*

For just a moment, the world stops.

Then, a loud explosion rings throughout the USJ, and Shigaraki’s head snaps in that direction. The Nomu looks up, startled by the sound, and Midoriya lets out a hoarse, shaky laugh, going limp in the monster’s hold.

Tsuyu turns, too, looking over her shoulder.

There’s dust and smoke clouding at the entrance of the USJ.

“You.” Shigaraki reaches out, fingers twitching by Midoriya’s face. *“What did you do?”*

Midoriya smiles. “I-If that’s who I think it is, t-then…” He coughs, but doesn’t falter. “You’re *screwed,* Handy-Man.”

Izuku is alive.

He knows his ribs are messed up--he knows they are, it’s obvious--and he’s pretty sure he has some kind of a head injury, but he’s alive. The Nomu had hurt him, yes, hurt him badly, and he can already hear Recovery Girl screaming at him for being reckless, but…

He’s alive.

And All Might is here.

He did it. He held off the villains, kept their attention on him, bought all the time he could. He did his best, fought his damndest, endured the Nomu's punches and slams.

And now All Might is here, and he knows he's safe. He knows he's safe, and he knows the rest of his classmates are safe, too. Aizawa is safe. The Nomu won't hurt him again. The Nomu won't hurt *any* of them again.

Shigaraki raises his head towards the smoke. "Nomu," he says, suddenly urgent, "kill the brat, before--"

"BEFORE WHAT, VILLAINS?"

All Might's voice booms overhead, and a second later, the hero is *there,* and Izuku wants to cry with relief.

"Come now," All Might says, grinning, although Izuku can see a slight falter in the hero's vibrant smile. "Do you really think I'd let you kill one of my dear students?"

The Nomu screeches, drops Izuku, and leaps at him; All Might retracts his fist and lands a solid blow to the Nomu's stomach. The creature falters, but doesn't stop; it pulls back its own fist for a punch, and All Might retaliates accordingly.

Izuku lays there for a while, gasping for breath as the ground trembles beneath him. His spirit isn't glued to him anymore now that he can think beyond the pain; he can dissociate now, if he wants. He can get up again. He can keep fighting--

"Young Midoriya, stay down!"

Izuku's eyes snap open, and he raises his head, just barely. The Nomu and All Might are exchanging blows, shockwaves following every punch; Shigaraki has retreated and is standing with Kurogiri, watching.

"I know what you're thinking!" All Might calls over to him, pulling back his fist, "but stay down! Have some faith in your teacher, my boy!" All Might lets the punch fly, and the Nomu goes flying. A second later, they're at it again.

Izuku drops his head back to the ground and lies still. Now that some of the adrenaline has worn off, all he feels is exhaustion, pain and nausea. He wants to throw up, but doesn't; he isn't sure there's

anything left in his stomach *to* throw up.

He watches the fight through half-lidded eyes. He watches All Might and the Nomu exchange blows back and forth, punch after punch, slam after slam, and it looks like All Might's winning. It looks like he's winning, it seems like--

There's a pull at Izuku's chest like before, as All Might wraps his arms around the Nomu from behind. Izuku knows what he's going to do; he's going to try slamming the Nomu head-first into the ground to immobilize him, but...that *tug*--

"Don't do it!" Izuku shrieks, and All Might stops. "If you do that--!"

All Might doesn't ask for an explanation; he stops what he'd been about to do and slams his fist into the Nomu's stomach instead.

The suffocating feeling of dread leaves Izuku's chest, and he breathes a short, breathy laugh of relief. He doesn't know what that feeling is, that *foreboding,* but he makes a note to put it down in his "Dissociation" notebook when he gets home.

...Why do I have to be the one...with the confusing Quirk…

"Midori-chan. Midori-chan. *Midori-chan."*

Izuku opens his eyes--he doesn't remember closing them--and Tsuyu's face swims into view.

"We have to go," she says. "All we'll do here is get in All Might's way, we need to go. Here…" She takes his arm, carefully, and pulls it around her neck. "I'll help you."

"I-I'm fine," he lies through his teeth (literally--he's gritting them. It's the only thing keeping him from crying out). "I-I can walk."

"No you can't."

She pulls him to his feet, carefully, and wraps an arm around his waist. His ribs are burning, but he doesn't protest. "We ran into Kirishima and Todoroki, they're helping Mineta get Aizawa to safety. Come on, we'll take it slow..."

They start walking. Izuku is stumbling all over the place, and he's sure he'd fall if it weren't for her. The ground is shaking and trembling beneath them, and a couple lurches almost knock Izuku off his feet.

It hurts…

Izuku grits his teeth and tries to fight through it.

…It hurts…

They get a considerable distance before Izuku can't do it anymore. His vision blurs and goes dark for a second; when he opens his eyes, Tsuyu is calling him again, supporting his weight.

"Y-Yeah…o-on second thought…" Izuku sucks in a shaky breath and exhales it as a weak laugh. He hopes it doesn't sound as pathetic as it feels. "C-Can…I just…sit down for a sec…?"

Tsuyu glances behind them; All Might and the Nomu are still fighting, but All Might definitely has the upper hand. They're a considerable distance away now, far away enough that the trembling and lurching ground doesn't affect them anymore.

She nods. "Alright."

Izuku sinks to the ground, and she sinks down beside him, maintaining a hold around his waist. He's grateful for it. It makes for a nice anchor through the pain in his ribs and head. Absentmindedly, he reaches towards his neck; his thumb brushes the cold, smooth metal of his bell, and he lets out a sigh of relief.

It's okay, then.

Everything's okay now.

It's not okay. Everything is *very not okay*.

The Nomu is gone, All Might defeated it, literally sent it into the sky up, up, up and away with a finishing blast and a resounding shout of victory. Only Shigaraki and Kurogiri remain now.

Everything is not okay.

It's *not okay*. Nothing is okay anymore. Absolutely *nothing*.

The tug and yank and pull in Izuku's chest is stronger than ever. He's washed with a feeling worse than anything he's ever felt before, worse than the feeling he'd had when he stepped into the USJ, worse than the feeling he'd had right before Aizawa was slammed into the ground by the Nomu.

It's *worse* than *any of that.* It is so much worse, so much more suffocating, so much more *terrifying…*

Shigaraki and Kurogiri stand their ground. All Might smiles at them, and of course he does, but it's a bluff. Izuku thinks about what happened earlier, the three fingers Thirteen held up. All Might has been running on sheer will power this entire time. He's out of time.

And now there's a tug in Izuku's chest as a feeling of foreboding washes over him. He wonders, briefly…

...If this is a *death omen.*

His spirit gives a lurch. Tsuyu is beside him, watching the same scene as him, but she doesn't know. She doesn't *know* the extent of what is happening here. She doesn't feel what Izuku feels, doesn't realize how bad of a predicament this truly is.

Izuku grinds his teeth together.

I can't let him die.

He remembers All Might offering him One For All, remembers the days spent training on the beach leading up to the entrance exam. He remembers All Might ruffling his hair, sending him texts to check up on him, visiting him in the infirmary. He remembers All Might joking to cheer him up, remembers the words *you can become a hero.*

And there's a stronger tug in Izuku's chest.

I can't let him die.

"T-Tsuyu," Izuku says, not even facing her, "...hold my body for me."

"Hold your— *Midori-chan!"*

Izuku takes off, leaving his body behind, and flies back towards the danger. The pain is gone immediately, and he feels suddenly rejuvenated, energized--maybe it's because he's not in his body, or maybe it's because he's desperate.

I can't let him die.

He doesn't know how, but All Might has become something of a father to him. He doesn't know how or when it happened, only that it *happened,* and he *can't let him die.*

I can't let him die.

He knows there isn't time, he knows All Might is out of time, and he knows that there is only a small window in which he has to act.

Shigaraki is running. All Might is standing. Izuku is flying.

Please…

…I want…

…I want to save him--!

And then, something odd happens, something that's never happened before.

Izuku *falls.*

He falls, *as a ghost.*

That's…

…That's never happened before. Never.

He slams into the dirt below, and dust flies up all around him. That's never happened before, either. Hitting the ground doesn't hurt, of course--he can't feel pain as a ghost--but it's enough to thoroughly shake him.

What just…?

He raises his head off the ground immediately, still reeling over the fact that he is *on the ground* and not just hovering over it. He's a ghost. He's a ghost and he's *lying on the physical ground.* Not phasing through it, like he usually does. Beneath him, for the first time *ever,* the ground is *solid.*

He looks down at his hands—they're still transparent, like they always are when he's a ghost, but his skin is outlined now, outlined in a faint, glowing green, and he has *no idea* what this means.

"What the hell." Shigaraki's breathless, horrified voice brings Izuku back to reality, and he raises his head as the villain stumbles backwards, looking like he's seen a ghost.

It's at that moment that Izuku realizes it, and Shigaraki's horror suddenly makes sense.

...They can see me.

He looks around. Tsuyu is behind him, eyes wide and full of shock. Across from him are the villains, staring, horrified. All Might has turned to him, and although he's still standing firm with that unwavering smile, Izuku can see a small hint of fear and shock. A little further away, Izuku sees his own body in a heap on the ground, unmoving and lifeless.

They can see me. They can all see me.

Izuku raises his head and picks himself up off the ground, a ground that is *solid* beneath him. He doesn't know what that means, what that implies, but...well...he'll have time to figure it out later.

Right now, though, he resolves to fight.

He runs.

The world around him spirals and fades, and suddenly he's moving faster than he's ever moved before. He feels somehow detached, like he's passenger instead of driver, and this is saying something considering he's about as detached from his body right now as he can get. His thought process is in shambles. He has no idea what's happening anymore, no concept of anything.

But he runs. Because he knows his friends are in danger. He knows the people he loves are in mortal peril and he *doesn't want to lose them.*

He doesn't want to lose Tsuyu. He doesn't want to lose Iida. He doesn't want to lose Uraraka. He doesn't want to lose Aizawa. He doesn't want to lose Kirishima. He doesn't want to lose All Might.

I can't lose them.

He feels something—a tug, but it's not of himself anymore. It’s not *familiar.* He feels something grab at him, or rather, several somethings. Something tugs him. Another something pushes him. Another something *pulls him.*

He feels a rush of energy, a burst of power, and words echo through his head:

Fight.

Win.

Save them.

The world spirals into white, and he's consumed.

Tsuyu doesn't know what she's seeing.

Midoriya has always been... *strange.* Him and his dumb jokes and his nervous laugh, the way he rubbed the back of his neck when he didn't know what else to do. She's only known him for a little while, but she's picked up so much of his personality, so much of his *heart.*

But somehow, he's also the boy who came first in the entrance exam, beating out people like Bakugou, people with raw power and combat abilities, and Tsuyu has never understood why or how. Midoriya always seemed harmless enough, a mess of smiles and puns and nervous laughter.

But now, in this moment...she understands it. She understands all too clearly.

Midoriya's body is limp, leaning up against her, but she sees him running. She *sees Midoriya running towards Shigaraki.* His image isn't entirely clear; it reminds her of a rough outline, a sketch if you would, bright green and glowing.

But it isn't just Midoriya.

Tsuyu...doesn't know *what* she's looking at.

Shigaraki steps backwards; Midoriya skids to a stop across from him a little ways away. All Might is there, too, but he isn't moving, simply...observing, watching as Midoriya stares Shigaraki down.

Midoriya is fuming, emitting a tangible feeling of *anger* and *malice* and *determination,* and so far, the Midoriya Tsuyu knows only possesses the final of those traits. He gets angry, yes, but not like this. Never like this.

And that's not even the scary part.

Shigaraki lifts his head and takes a step backwards, eyes wide, and Tsuyu almost can't believe it.

He'd been confident before, attacking and running and swinging and punching but--

He's scared now. He's *afraid.* Afraid of Midoriya.

But that's not it. That's not *all.*

Tsuyu watches. And she notices something she really should've noticed before.

Midoriya stares Shigaraki down with a twisted, bright-eyed look, and...

...*He isn't alone.*

Toshinori watches, too stunned and shocked to do or say a single thing. He watches Izuku's face, sketched in an outline of green--Izuku's *ghost,* that's what this is, and he can *see it.* For the first time since meeting the boy—and, by extension, probably the first time in the boy's entire life— *they can see his ghost.*

And Toshinori honestly wishes that's the most unsettling thing about the situation before him, but it's not.

Izuku--Izuku's ghost, his *spirit* --has several scars on his face. There's the jagged one mirrored on his physical body, yes, but there are others, too--smaller ones, ones that aren't nearly as noticeable. That's unsettling, too, but even so, it's *not* the most unsettling thing about this.

The thing is, right now, Izuku isn't alone. He's standing, and he's staring down Shigaraki with a twisted look, but he's not standing alone.

There are figures, *people,* standing with him, their outlines fuzzy and distorted and nearly impossible to make out. There are seven of them. Seven transparent figures whose facial expressions are clouded and fuzzy, and Toshinori doesn't understand why or how or who--

And then, suddenly, it clicks. His eyes go wide, and his heart skips a beat.

Seven figures.

Seven.

One For All...

No way.

There's...

...There's no way.

“Who…” Shigaraki's eyes are wide, and his hands—his real ones—tremble at his sides, and all his confidence from earlier is completely, totally *gone.*

He stares at Izuku, horrified, and whispers,

“What the hell are you?”

Izuku grins, and even though Toshinori *knows* this boy, even though Toshinori knows he's cheerful and kind and tells stupid jokes, the look on his face sends a dozen icy chills down Toshinori's spine.

The boy’s smile, as a *person,* is nothing short of sunshine incarnate. It’s the type of contagious smile that you look at and think, *Nothing can go wrong. It's going to be alright, no matter what.* It’s a reassuring smile, a bright smile, a *hero's* smile. A smile Izuku saves for the people he loves.

But the boy’s smile as a *ghost,* whether or not he means for it to be, is a thing of nightmares. It’s wide, too wide, showing off all his teeth, and Toshinori wonders what that grin looks like to the enemy.

He wonders what kind of icy chills are going down *Shigaraki's* spine.

Toshinori takes in a breath. He should really, *really* stop being surprised by this kid...

“You know what,” Izuku starts slowly, “I’m just as scared as you are right now, Shigaraki. I’m just as terrified. Every part of me is screaming to run, but I’m not going to do that. I care too much about my friends to do that.”

He takes a single step forward. The figures behind him follow.

Shigaraki steps back, shaking. “Kurogiri,” he says, “get us out of here--”

“I’m a coward,” Izuku goes on. “I know I’m a coward, and I’m pretty sure that’ll never change. I’ll always be one, no matter what. But, for some reason...right now…”

He looks at Shigaraki with blank, dead eyes, and when Shigaraki steps backwards again, Toshinori *almost* does the same.

“I don’t think I’m nearly as scared of you as I *should* be,” Izuku tells him blankly. “I think...the only reason I’m scared at all...is because I don’t want to lose the people I love. I’m scared to lose *them.”*

“Kurogiri,” Shigaraki says, “Kurogiri, let’s *go*--”

“But,” Izuku goes on slowly, taking his sweet time, “as far as fearing for my own life is concerned...”

Behind Izuku, the seven figures file into place—no, not *behind* Izuku, *with* Izuku, *alongside* Izuku. If Izuku notices, he doesn't comment. A wide, toothy grin splits his face again, and his bright eyes lock on Shigaraki like a viper waiting to strike.

Only, in this moment, Izuku is more terrifying than any viper.

“...The dead have no reason to fear the living,” Izuku says, still grinning. “And I’m a ghost.”

Chapter End Notes

Find me on tumblr!

Can I just say that I was incredibly overwhelmed (in the best way) by all the feedback last chapter??? I mean??? Thank you guys so stinkin' much. You made my day hwakdjsajkdahksd thank you. :) :) :) I think I responded to all the comments! I always like to do that when I'm able :) :) :)

Anyway, updates have been really fast lately, but they'll be slowing down a bit now (maybe?? Tbh I have no idea, I wasn't ever expecting it to be this quick wahdksajd XD). But yeah, I'm loving this, and I'm really glad all of you guys are, too! :D

Thank you all soooo much for your support last chapter! This next chapter's gonna be great! :D
:D
: D
: D

Until next time, go beyond! PLUS ULTRA!!!!!!! :D

(Also: I will be changing all the chapter titles to tracks in musicals now, so *thumbs up* :D)

It's Quiet Uptown

Chapter Summary

"It's Quiet Uptown" from Hamilton

“There are moments that the words don’t reach,
There is suffering too terrible to name.
You hold your child as tight as you can,
And push away the unimaginable.”

Chapter Notes

THERE'S MORE ART OH MY GOSH

sqooboo

amygdaloid07

estherflails

brightstudenttraveler

FloatingOnAFeeling

minryll

sketchasylumrue

THANK YOU GUYS SO MUCH YOU'RE ALL SERIOUSLY AMAZING WHAKDJHJASKD. :D :D :D

Also--all the Hamilton listeners I now know are out there thanks to that reference I made in the last chapter--I bet you're already wary of the chapter title. ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Toshinori knows what fear looks like. He’s fought enough villains to have it ingrained in his memory--the instant the villains realize fighting is pointless, the moment they realize they’ve been beat...that’s when fear kicks in. When they’ve given all they can to the fight and have run out of strength.

And Toshinori knows his own fear, too. He feels like, at this point, fear is more of an old friend than anything else.

Now, he watches as a fifteen year old highschool boy stares down villains who attacked him and his classmates with the intention of killing them.

And it isn't the boy who's afraid.

Izuku takes a step forward. The seven distorted images-- *ghosts* -- follow his lead, hovering over the ground behind him. Shigaraki and Kurogiri step *backwards,* away.

They're afraid. As they should be.

"So," Izuku says, raising a hand. "You seemed pretty confident that you could kill All Might earlier, didn't you? Why is it that you're backing down now to a kid?" He flicks his fingers back towards himself, eyes bright above a wide, twisted smile. "Come at me, bro."

Shigaraki and Kurogiri flinch back. For all their talk, for them storming into the USJ ready to face "All Might" head-on...as this fifteen year old boy stares them down…

...They're afraid.

And Toshinori thinks he may have misjudged Midoriya Izuku. He mistook the boy for a normal middle school kid who loves puns and lame gags and longs to save others more than anyone else Toshinori ever met. And this is all true for Izuku, of course, but it's not *all.*

When it boils down to it, Midoriya Izuku is a terrifying force to be reckoned with.

The boy smiles again, and it's the most unsettling thing Toshinori has ever seen.

"Well?" Izuku says. "What are you waiting for?"

Shigaraki raises a hand and points with a shaking finger. For the record, it's a brave move for someone in his predicament--after all, he's only being stared down by *eight ghosts.*

"You." Shigaraki's voice wavers. "You're not human, you can't be human. You're--"

"A monster, yeah, I know." Something flickers in Izuku's eyes, though, as he says it--something like pain. It's gone a second later, replaced with another eerie smile, but it'd definitely been there, and the smile

he wears now is definitely forced. “You’re probably right. But if being…” He pauses, fumbles for a moment, “…if being like *this* means I can protect the people I care about, well…yeah. I’ll be a monster.”

He raises his head.

“So what about you, Handy-Man?” he asks--his smile fades with the light in his eyes, and he stares at Shigaraki with a blank, dead expression. “Are *you* okay with being a monster?”

Silence.

And then, many things happen at once.

Gunfire rings out overhead; blood spurts from several gunshot wounds on Shigaraki’s arms, legs--Kurogiri leaps into the fray, covering Shigaraki with his warp gate and folding in on himself. Bullets sink into the mist harmlessly, and a second later, the gate disappears with Shigaraki.

They’re gone.

“…So they ran after all,” Izuku says, staring at the now-empty space. He laughs hoarsely and shakes his head, and when his voice comes back, it’s small and fragile.

“…And people called *me* a coward.”

Toshinori winces. His heart gives a lurch. *Midoriya…*

And then he considers the gunshots and turns in the direction from whence they came. He can’t see it very well, but there’s a band of heroes swarming at the entrance of the USJ, ready for battle. There are others there, too--students of Class 1-A having regrouped at the front, plus several teams of medics. A little closer to him, Toshinori sees Tsuyu, looking towards the entrance, with Izuku’s lifeless body leaning up against her.

Toshinori turns back towards Izuku’s spirit. The seven figures around him flock, distorted, but they’re fading now, little by little. He watches for a moment, still stunned by the whole situation.

And then, one of the figures turns to him.

He can’t make out any defining features, of course--it’s just a fuzzy form, a fuzzy, distorted *ghost,* but they’re definitely looking at him. A

pair of bright yellow eyes, not unlike Kurogiri's, find his.

The figure raises a fuzzy limb--an arm--and waves.

Toshinori blinks.

And then, all seven figures fade into the air like they'd never been there at all.

Izuku doesn't know what happened.

Well, yes, he does, vaguely--but it's more of a concept. A blur. He knows what happened, what he did; he's just having a seriously hard time comprehending it.

He looks down at his hands. His figure is as vibrant as it'd been a second ago, and his feet are still planted firmly on solid ground.

Weird, he thinks, raising his head. *That's never happened before…*

"Young Midoriya!"

Izuku's head whips around. All Might is standing there, surrounded by a cloud of smoke; he finally ran out of time, then. He looks worse for wear, but not seriously injured, and Izuku lets out a huge sigh of relief.

That's good…

…I made it in time…

He runs towards his mentor--as a ghost, of course--and stops just in front of him. All Might stares at him for a long moment, and Izuku stares back--and then, All Might reaches out, hesitates, and ruffles Izuku's hair.

It's odd, Izuku thinks, that he's able to actually *do* that right now.

All Might withdraws his hand. "Young Midoriya…your Quirk doesn't make any sense."

Izuku laughs loosely, and he thinks that it's nice to be able to laugh after what happened today. "Thanks," he says. "I'm sure whatever happened here…I-I mean…all of *this."* He gestures to himself. "…There's, I mean…"

“I know,” All Might says, nodding. “We’ll figure it out, don’t worry. I’m sure there’s an explanation.”

Izuku smiles, nods.

“Oh--” All Might pauses, frowning. “You’re fading.”

“I’m--?” Izuku looks down at himself. Some of the vibrance is leaving, returning him to his normal transparent, ghostly form. “I see. I should probably, y’know...find my body…”

“You do that,” All Might says. “I’ll wait here for now. I can’t maintain my other form anymore.”

Izuku nods. “Gotcha. Well--bye!”

He takes off towards Tsuyu. His footsteps feel light; in a second, he’ll be floating again.

“Young Midoriya.”

Izuku stops and looks over his shoulder. All Might smiles at him.

“I’m proud of you, my boy. What you did took a lot of courage. ”

Izuku blinks. Then, he beams.

“You too!” Izuku says, and without waiting for a response, he spins around and races towards Tsuyu and his body.

By the time he gets there, he’s a full ghost again, transparent and unseen. His feet don’t touch the ground anymore; he’s back to hovering.

There’s a team of medics already laying his body on a stretcher; Tsuyu is standing by them, telling them how he sustained the injuries, explaining that he’d been slammed into the ground several times by Shigaraki’s monster. Izuku sucks in a breath (or, what he thinks is a breath--he *is* a ghost) and bites his lip. His body looks...bad. There’s blood on the sides of his face from gashes on his head, his skin is ghostly pale *(Ironic,* he thinks), and he remembers the sharp pain he’d felt in his ribs. The medics are bandaging him all over the place, but still; healing will take time, and until then, it’s going to *hurt.*

Izuku hesitates, steels himself, and slips back into his body.

It *burns.*

His eyes snap open, his cry of pain swallowed up by a sharp inhale of breath. The medics notice he's awake and move faster now; someone flashes a penlight in his eyes, and someone else is saying something about an oxygen mask.

Everything is spinning and blurring together. His stomach burns and twists with nausea, and he turns his head. He chokes; his throat burns, it tastes like there's metal in his mouth--

Oh.

There's a splatter of red on the otherwise white stretcher.

That's…

...Oh.

That's *blood*…

He can't register it. He knows what it is, of course, but things aren't clicking. There's business around him; he feels like he's underwater, his ears ringing, the voices muffled. He feels hands on his forearm; Tsuyu's there, and her grip makes for a nice anchor as the world around him slips away. Something is put over his mouth and nose, and then they're moving. Tsuyu's hands slip off his arm, and with that he's dragged under by pain and shock.

When Tenya comes back, it's with reinforcements from U.A.

The heroes spread out immediately, and so do the medics, and Tenya's eyes scan those who are here, searching. Most of his classmates are here up front, being looked over by a few medics; the heroes are rallying up unconscious villains, tying their hands behind their backs to be shunted off to police custody where they belong.

"Iida!"

Tenya turns as Uraraka sprints towards him, looking frantic. He'd passed her (along with Sero, Ashido and Shouji, and an injured Thirteen) on the way in, just outside the U.A.'s double doors. A team of medics are outside helping Thirteen now, and the hero didn't seem to be gravely injured, which are both good things.

"Uraraka," Tenya says heavily, but not without relief. "You're alright, then. I'm glad."

Uraraka nods. “Deku bought us time to escape,” she tells him, but her voice is thick. "Iida, do...do you have any idea what...what actually happened earlier? W-With Deku?”

Tenya shakes his head. "I haven't got a clue."

And he doesn't, he *hasn't,* but he knows there'll be time for all of that later. He'll be able to ask Midoriya and hopefully get some answers—after all, there's a reason for everything that happened earlier. He doesn't know what it is yet, but there definitely is one.

“Hey, you two!”

Tenya and Uraraka raise their heads. Kirishima stops just in front of them, not even out of breath.

“Glad to see you guys are still alive,” he says, and he says it like he's trying to make light of the situation, but can't quite decide how to go about it. “Man, what I wouldn't do for one of Midoriya's dumb jokes right about now…” He stops abruptly and looks around for a moment or two. “...Come to think of it...where *is* Midoriya?”

“Last I saw him he was going to make sure everyone else was safe,” Uraraka answers, wringing her hands together. “Do you think...do you think he's okay?”

“I'm sure he’s fine!” Kirishima says, and he sounds so sure of himself that Tenya can't help but believe it. “I mean, this is Midoriya we're talking about, he’s tough. I'm still trying to figure out how the heck he came first in the entrance exam, though…”

Tenya tenses. He shares a side-glance with Uraraka, who seems just as uncomfortable.

“...Oh, crap.” Kirishima's eyes are wide. “I missed something big, didn't I.”

“Big” seems like an understatement, and their lack of answer is enough for Kirishima.

“Dag-freaking- *nabbit.”*

“It was so cool, though!” Uraraka says immediately, and there's light in her eyes now, light that wasn't there a second ago. She calms down as she goes on, but the sparkle doesn’t leave her eyes. “It was really amazing. Deku... *he's* really amazing. He kept making puns at that

freaky warp-gate villain."

"No kidding!" Kirishima grins. "Well, that's our Midoriya for ya, I guess. I'll have to ask him about it sometime—"

A team of medics show up suddenly, rolling a stretcher with them, and Tenya feels like all the air is sucked out of his lungs at once. Kirishima's voice cuts off. Uraraka gasps sharply, and her hands fly to cover her mouth.

That's...

...That's *Midoriya.*

He's unconscious, and he's paler than Tenya has ever seen him. There's blood on his head, on his face, on his chin; there's an oxygen mask over his mouth and nose and a small, portable tank on the stretcher. The medics are frantic, moving quickly and precisely. Tsuyu is there, too, and she has this haunted look in her eyes, like she's seen a ghost.

"Holy crap," Kirishima whispers, staring. "Holy... *crap…"*

Tenya can't look away. He wants to, he really does, but he can't. He stares, he watches; the medics are talking, and he makes out words like "ribs" and "concussion" and "crushed" but that's all. He wants to say something to Uraraka and Kirishima, maybe a word of comfort or consolation but he can't, not when the only thought going through his mind is

All I did was run.

He stares, watching, unable to do anything else, and all he can think about is the fact that he abandoned Midoriya. Midoriya had told him to go, of course, and Tenya wasn't about to argue with him, not when he sounded so serious and desperate, but in the end, when it came down to it,

All I did was run.

Tsuyu disappeared a little while ago, he doesn't notice that until now. He sees her talking with Ashido a little ways off, but he can't exactly register it.

All I did was run.

In the end, while Midoriya and the others stayed and fought...

...All I did was run.

Ochako stares, understanding but not quite computing. There's blood, there's Deku, and there's bandages and there's *blood* and it looks so *wrong* on his face. His eyes are closed and his skin is pale and there's *blood* and there's an oxygen mask and there are medics and people talking around her and there's shock and fear and confusion because *how can this happen how can this happen this isn't happening it can't it can't it can't I can't I can't--*

Kirishima runs past her unexpectedly, and she follows on numb legs, although she doesn't really register moving at all. Iida is beside her, but it takes her longer than it should to realize this.

Kirishima kneels, and Iida and Ochako sink to their knees beside him. It's Kirishima who moves first, reaching out and closing his hands around Deku's limp, pale one. And then Iida closes his own hands around Kirishima's, and Ochako follows in suit. She's shaking.

"Hang in there, buddy." Kirishima's voice is heavy. *"Hang in there."*

Deku doesn't answer. His eyes are closed and the blood stands out stark on his pale face, and it's so *wrong,* because Deku is always so full of life and light and now he's *still,* he's *too still.* Ochako has a suffocating urge to sob and scream, but she can't make a sound. Her eyes are dry. It still hasn't *clicked.*

She doesn't *want* it to click.

All I did was run.

The medics come back and they're forced to let go.

All I did was run.

The medics take Deku away.

All I did was run.

When the tears *do* come, they have no mercy.

Izuku is burning.

He feels like there are hot coals inside him, burning him from the inside out. It's unlike anything he's ever felt before, a painful,

excruciating, *scorching* sensation that leaves him unable to breathe and wanting to scream.

He doesn't scream, though. He can't scream. He doesn't have the breath to do so.

He wonders if he's dying. If this is what dying feels like. It has to be, there's no way he can *survive* and feel this way. It doesn't seem possible.

"Hey. Kiddo. You're not dead yet."

It's a woman's voice. Izuku doesn't recognize it. But, amidst the burning haze and fog of pain, he thinks he feels something stir within his chest--something much gentler and cool. Comforting, almost.

"You're pretty close, but you're not dead yet."

Izuku swallows and squeezes his eyes shut. *I don't want to die.* It's probably the first time he's ever thought such a thing. *I don't want to die. I don't want to die.*

"Yeah, I know you don't. You're not going to. You're a lot tougher than people give you credit for, you know that? You have a strong spirit, you'll be alright."

Izuku isn't sure if it's literal or not, but he's in too much pain to give it much thought.

"...You're doing great, kiddo, just keep fighting. There are people waiting for you. You don't want to let them down, do you? You risked so much to save them."

Izuku never stops to think about who exactly he's talking to or how he's able to do it. Right now, hurt and confused and *scared,* he'll hold onto any source of comfort he can get.

"You're gonna be fine, just hang in there, alright? Hang in there."

There's nothing he sees or hears to indicate that the speaker has vanished; only the returning feeling of loneliness tells him that she's gone. He wants to call out, to ask her to stay with him, but he doesn't. An unnatural wave of exhaustion overwhelms him, and he lets go of his consciousness.

But, just before he's dragged under, a name comes to mind.

Nana Shimura.

He has no idea where the name came from or why it popped into his head. He doesn't know the name, but somewhere, in the back of his mind, he feels like he should.

"I can't believe you."

"I know," Toshinori says.

"You insufferable, boar-headed--how could you *not tell me something like this?"*

"I know." He feels numb.

"Don't you 'I know' me!" Recovery Girl snaps furiously. "If you *knew,* then *why didn't you mention this sooner!?"*

Toshinori doesn't know how to answer. "The boy is...he's...not comfortable with it," he says, and it sounds like a dumb excuse, even to himself. "He doesn't...I didn't think it'd turn out like this…"

No one did. Not even Izuku.

"Oh, so you just *casually* forgot to tell me that the boy can *eject his ghost!?"* Recovery Girl shouts--not too loudly, but loudly enough to get his attention. "What made you think that was a good idea!?"

"I don't know. I'm sorry."

He doesn't really know who he's apologizing to, but it feels less and less like Recovery Girl.

Izuku is unconscious. He's been unconscious for the past day now. His injuries aren't nearly grave enough to land him in a hospital, but they're still serious; he's still on oxygen, and there's gauze around his head and smaller bandaids over cuts on his face. Beneath his shirt, his ribs are bandaged, and an IV needle is buried beneath the skin of his wrist.

It seems strange--Toshinori was engaged in combat with a monster specifically designed to kill him, and yet, all his injuries healed within the day he received them. Izuku's injuries, however, have barely healed at all.

"...What did he do to himself for this to happen?" Recovery Girl asks

him. The bite is gone from her tone (or, at least, some of it is), and she doesn't sound angry anymore, merely...tired. Sad. "What *happened?"*

"...To be completely honest with you…" Toshinori's voice is heavy, and it almost doesn't feel like his own. "...I don't know *what* he did. Young Asui mentioned he was attacked by Shigaraki's Nomu, which explains his ribs and his head, but…"

That's the thing. Broken ribs and a minor concussion wouldn't be enough to keep Izuku unconscious like this. Recovery Girl's Quirk strikes fast and true; if a concussion were the only problem, Izuku would be awake right now.

But he isn't.

"His life is out of danger now," Recovery Girl says, and Toshinori feels a bit of weight leave his chest--only a bit, though. "I assume he'll be making a full recovery within the week, but...Toshinori, what he did to himself, it's...this isn't a joke. His life is safe *now,* but...it was close. It was way too close."

The air is gone from his lungs. Everything feels so... *surreal.*

"Can you...tell me exactly what it is he did to himself?"

Recovery Girl nods stiffly. "His heart rate dropped dangerously low, first of all, and...his breathing was...he was barely breathing at *all.* It's better now, but, whatever he did...it damaged him. I don't know half of what I'd like to know about this boy's Quirk, and until I do, there's not much else I can say."

Toshinori nods heavily. "The boy's parents," he says--anything to distract him from what's right in front of him is good. "Have they been contacted?"

"I spoke with the boy's mother a while ago," Recovery Girl answers. "She should be here any minute now--"

The door bangs the wall behind them, and in tumbles a woman with vibrant green hair and matching eyes.

The resemblance is uncanny. Toshinori knows who she is before she even introduces herself.

(She doesn't introduce herself at all, actually--she catches herself and sprints across the room to the infirmary bed where Izuku lays.)

He hears her sobbing, hears her whispering comforting mantras of "It's okay" and "you're okay" as she strokes Izuku's hair off his face, and Toshinori turns away, feeling like he's invading on some special moment between mother and son.

It ends sooner than he expects.

"What happened to him!?" Inko cries, and it's aimed at both Toshinori and Recovery Girl.

"He's exhausted," Recovery Girl says. "I expect him to regain consciousness any day now, but--"

"That doesn't explain *what happened!"* Inko says, and she seems more angry than sad now. "You said there was a villain attack, y-you said... *h-how…"*

It's probably a stupid thing to do, but Toshinori does it anyway.

"It's my fault," he says, and Recovery Girl and Inko are staring at him immediately. "What happened to Midor--Izuku. It's my fault. I take full responsibility."

Recovery Girl opens her mouth, but doesn't say anything--Inko turns to him fully, balled fists shaking at her sides.

"You're All Might."

It isn't a question. She doesn't ask about his appearance, isn't confused in the slightest. She knows who he is, just like he knew her.

He nods. "Yes," he says. "I'm--"

The slap comes as a surprise, but it probably shouldn't have.

Toshinori flinches, but he doesn't falter. He's had worse--the slap stings, but that's about it. It's nothing.

"What is this, then!?" Inko questions, and her eyes are full of tears. He can't tell if she's angry, scared, or sad anymore--maybe it's all three. "What kind of things were Izuku dragged into!? What *happened* to him!?"

"He and his classmates were attacked," Toshinori says. He isn't irritated, not at all. He doesn't really know what he's feeling right now. "I'm...I'm sorry--"

"What good does that do now!?" Inko demands, and Toshinori's teeth snap together. "'Sorry' doesn't…" She stops, chokes. "S-Sorry doesn't help my son! He's my *son,* you realize that, don't you!?"

"Yes, I do. I'm sor--"

"If you apologize, *one more time--!"*

"Stop it!" Recovery Girl cuts in, and the argument (if you can really call it an argument) ends immediately. "This is an infirmary! You want the boy to be able to rest and recover, don't you!? If you're going to yell at each other, take it outside!"

It doesn't sound like a suggestion. Silence covers the room like a thick cloud-- *dead* silence, Izuku would say if he were conscious.

He doesn't realize it until now, but he really, *really* misses the boy's jokes.

I'm sorry, is all Toshinori can think, both to Inko and to Izuku. *I'm sorry.*

I'm sorry.

I'm sorry.

"I'm sorry."

Toshinori turns to stare at Inko, confused. They're sitting on a bench outside by the infirmary door, where they'd decided to take the conversation while Recovery Girl checked over Izuku again.

"...Why are you apologizing?" Toshinori asks.

Inko shakes her head. "I shouldn't have gotten on your case like that," she says, "or...or slapped you--"

"Believe me, I deserved it."

"--No, you didn't. Y-You didn't. I wasn't thinking, I was just…"

"You don't have to apologize to me," Toshinori says. "You didn't do anything wrong."

"I still shouldn't have yelled at you," Inko says heavily. "I-I know you care about Izuku. You're…" She wrings her hands together. "...You're

worried about him, too. I...I know you are. I-I just, Izuku, he…" She pauses; for just a moment, a bit of light flashes in her eyes. "He's the only thing I care about in this world. H-He's my son, and I...I-I...I-I'm just…"

"You don't have to explain yourself, I get it."

Inko nods stiffly. "I want to be supportive," she says. "I want him to be able to follow his dream and become a hero, but...it...it scares me. It's...It's always scared me."

Toshinori looks away. "Yeah," he says. "The life of a hero isn't...it isn't a safe one--"

"N-No, that's...well, that's part of it, but that's not really what I mean."

Toshinori turns to her again. She looks the other way.

"It's his Quirk," Inko says. "His power, his...his 'Dissociating.' That scares me. I'll...I'll never forget the first time he did it. He was...he was four, and...and it was the most terrifying thing I've ever seen, him just... *dropping* like that."

Toshinori listens, understanding. The first time Izuku dropped in front of him, he'd been thoroughly shaken, too. He has no idea what that'd feel like for a mother and her four year old.

"That...that kind of stuff sticks with you," Inko goes on. "A-And I don't like him breaking his bones, either, I don't like him coming home with slings or crutches but...but he's coming home, still. His Quirk, the one he was born with...it can…" She stops and drags in a long, shuddering breath. "It can do *this* to him, and...if he pushes himself, like I know he will, I...I-I don't know what it's capable of doing to him."

Toshinori has no idea what to say. He agrees; Izuku is reckless and stubborn, and he cares too much about others and too little about himself. After what Toshinori saw Izuku do at the USJ...he knows there's *nothing* the boy wouldn't do when it comes to saving the people he loves.

Absolutely *nothing* he wouldn't do.

And that thought is *terrifying*.

"So you're...All Might, then," Inko says--an abrupt change of subject,

and Toshinori is glad for it.

“Yeah, that’s me.”

She looks at him for a moment. “You’re…”

Toshinori doesn’t lie. “I sustained an injury in a fight about six years ago that weakened me. When I’m not working as a hero, well...” He gestures vaguely to himself. “...This is me.”

Inko nods. He assumes, in any other situation, she’d be more shaken than this than she appears. Except, right now, Izuku is most definitely at the forefront of her mind, which means everything else takes lesser priority.

Inko opens her mouth to say something else, but echoing, pounding footsteps swallow up whatever it was she’d been about to say.

Kirishima, Uraraka, and Iida sprint down the hallway, wide-eyed and frantic. They screech to a halt in front of the bench and turn toward Inko and Toshinori.

It’s Inko who speaks first, when no one else does. “O-Oh, hello,” she says, rising to her feet. Toshinori does the same beside her. “Y-You...you must be friends of Izuku’s, then.”

The three students look at each other briefly, then turn back towards Inko.

“Yeah,” Kirishima says. “I mean...we’ve only known him for a couple days, but…”

“That’s alright,” Inko says, and she smiles softly. “He’s told me a lot about you three, I believe--that is, if you’re Kirishima, Iida, and Uraraka.”

“Y-Yeah, t-that’s...that’s us,” Uraraka says, twisting her shoe into the ground. “A-And...and you must be Dek--I-I mean, Midoriya’s mom.”

Inko nods. “That’s me,” she says.

“So, you’re…” Kirishima raises a finger towards Toshinori, looking confused. “You’re his…?”

“He’s a friend of the family,” Inko cuts in, and she says it so simply and matter-of-factly that it’s impossible to argue with.

“Yagi Toshinori,” Toshinori says--he figures it’s alright for them to know his name, considering they don’t know he’s All Might. “Feel free to call me Toshinori.”

Iida takes a breath. “In that case…” He steps forward and bows lowly to the both of them. “I’m sorry,” he says. “I…I had a duty to protect Midoriya, not only as class representative but also as his friend, and…and I failed. I’m sorry.”

“I’m sorry, too,” Kirishima says, and he bows likewise. Uraraka is quick to follow suit.

“N-No, d-don’t do that,” Inko says at once, and the three look up at her, confused but listening. “Please, don’t. If you’re really friends of Izuku’s, he isn’t going to like you blaming yourselves. I-I know it’s hard, but please, *please* don’t. If Izuku knew you were doing that, it would make him very sad.”

Toshinori isn’t entirely sure why, but he gets the feeling it’s not directed just at Iida, Uraraka and Kirishima.

His mind is full of fog.

He feels fuzzy, and he isn’t absolutely sure of anything except that there’s pain. It’s dulled; he’s probably on some kind of medication, in that case, but it’s still there, and it hurts.

He can’t really think of anything. He doesn’t know where he is and he doesn’t know fully what’s going on. It hurts, though, it hurts a *lot,* and beneath his confusion, he just feels extremely *lost.*

He wants to wake up. He wants to drag himself out of whatever this haze is, but he isn’t sure he can. He wants to, though, he desperately wants to. He wants to open his eyes, he wants to see his friends, he misses them, he misses them a lot--

“You’re a tough one, you know.”

“Hang in there, kiddo. You’re doing great.”

“You’ve got a long road ahead, but you’re off to a great start. Keep on going.”

“You’re alright now. You saved them. You saved all of them.”

“You sure made those villains run, boy. It was awesome. Ten out of ten,

would watch again."

"Your friends are safe now, thanks to you."

"It's okay to rest if you want."

He doesn't recognize any of the voices, but it's...it's oddly *okay*. He doesn't *hear* them as much as he *feels* them, if that makes sense--he feels them in his mind and in his heart, and he doesn't know them but they're comforting. He isn't unsettled or scared in the slightest.

Somehow, he cracks his eyes open. His vision is blurry, and he hears a dull hum and a quiet, steady *drip, drip, drip*. He's in the infirmary, it seems, judging by the sliver he can see through his half-closed eyes.

His bell choker is on the side table, sitting there like it's waiting for him, and he raises a hand. His arm feels like lead, but it doesn't matter; he reaches over, and as soon as his stiff fingers close around his bell, he pulls it back towards himself.

He doesn't put it on, of course, he just...holds onto it. The cold metal is another anchor, something he finds he longs for quite often. The bell is an anchor, a reminder: he has friends waiting for him.

He closes his eyes again, feeling less lost and more secure than he's felt in a long, long while.

He isn't sure why he thinks it or who he wants to say it to, but, *Thank you,* he thinks, and he thinks it from the bottom of his heart.

The answers come immediately. Seven of them.

"You're welcome, kid."

"What do you mean? You did all that yourself."

"You're a brave one. You throwin' that warp-gate villain around? Priceless."

"No problem. I still think you're too reckless, though. Gotta work on that self-worth there."

"You've got the heart of a true hero, that's for sure."

"Go ahead and sleep for now, okay?"

"You've done us proud, kiddo."

Izuku smiles tiredly and lets exhaustion drag him back under. His fingers stay closed around the bell.

Chapter End Notes

Find me on tumblr! :D

I'M SO SORRY I DIDN'T GET TO RESPOND TO COMMENTS LAST CHAPTER I ended up getting sick again and my mom took me to the doctor and now I have like 5+ medications and an inhaler sO THAT'S A THING BUT THANK YOU ALL SO MUCH FOR ALL YOUR SUPPORT IT REALLY MEANS THE WORLD TO ME. I'll be doing my best to respond to all your comments this chapter to make it up to you. :D

And now to answer a few questions y'all left last chapter:

-If you guys have any suggestions for musical track chapter titles, I'd love to hear them!! :D
-You didn't get to see Izku kick butt w/ the previous OFA holders here but there will be time for that later I promise. :)
-Izuku is NOT going to be OP. His Quirk has a lot of physical drawbacks that I'll be going into more detail with the next chapter. That's one thing I want to avoid at all cost is making him overpowered. :)
-None of y'all are stupid--the chapter titles are a recent development added only just before chapter 7 hwajdahskdj. XD
-I'd love to say I was clever enough for the title "Dis(associate)" to come from Dis, who is the Roman god of the underworld and thereby hints towards Izuku's constant "dying" but no, it's not. It's "Dis(associate)" because Izuku is dissociating with his body, but technically still associating with the actual world. I really like the god of the underworld thing, though, it's super cool! :D

Anyway, that's it! Thanks soooooo much for everything, you guys! You're the best. :D Until next time, go beyond! PLUS ULTRA!!!!!!!!

Take a Break!

Chapter Summary

"Take a Break!" from Hamilton

Just take a break.

Chapter Notes

No art this time, but huge thanks again to all the artists who have done me stuff!!! :D :D :D :D :D

Also, you can trust the chapter title--time for some cooldown! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next time Izuku wakes up, he can actually form coherent thoughts, which is new—he hasn't been able to do that for quite some time.

He opens his eyes and blinks up at the infirmary's ceiling. He feels numb and not entirely *there,* and a headache pounds at his temples, but it's not bad. The pain he feels now is nothing compared to the pain he'd felt before; he can deal.

He still has his bell clutched in one hand, and he squeezes it for good measure. The metal is solid. He can feel it.

He's alive.

He takes in a breath, steels himself, and sits up. A burning pain shoots through his ribs, and he winces and wraps an arm around his middle, but the wave passes quickly. For a moment, he sits there and breathes —then, he raises his hands and settles his choker around his neck again, clipping it in the back.

He lowers his hands and takes a look around the room. The oxygen mask isn't around his face anymore; there's an IV drip beside the bed, next to a side table. On the side table is an empty packet of something *(Painkillers,* Izuku thinks. *Something Recovery Girl put in the IV),* and his phone.

He reaches for the latter and opens the homescreen. Dozens of messages spring at him all at once; they're all from the same person.

All Might.

Izuku stares for a long moment—then, he opens the phone and pulls up his messenger. Some of the texts are from yesterday; a couple are from the day before that; most are from today.

All Might
Young Uraraka gave me a book earlier.
I couldn't put it down.

Izuku stares at the message for a long moment.

And then he realizes.

That's…

…That's a *joke*.

He smiles and scrolls down a little further.

All Might
How do you make an eggroll?
You push it.

Oh *wow*.

All Might
How do trees access the computer?
They log in.

All Might
What do you call a broken can opener?
A can't opener.

There are more of them, loads more—Izuku laughs at some and groans and rolls his eyes at others, but he loves them all. He's surprised by the sheer amount of them, though—when he finally gets through them all (and what a privilege it is), the jokes stop, and there are a few final messages.

These were just sent a few minutes ago, he realizes, then begins to read.

All Might
I'm not as good at this as you are.
Making light of situations like this, I mean.
I guess I'm too worried to genuinely do that.

Izuku frowns. And then, his fingers swipe across the screen, and as soon as the text is done, he sends it.

Izuku Midoriya
HEY GUESS WHO'S NOT DEAD
THAT'S RIGHT IT'S ME
DEATH THOUGHT HE COULD HANDLE ME,
BUT HE GOT SICK OF MY JOKES REEEAL QUICK
SO NOW I'M BACK HERE :D :D :D
WHAT UP??

He isn't sure that's how he wants to approach this, but...he doesn't want things to stay the way they are now. He doesn't want people to worry about him anymore—he wants them to be able to laugh and smile again.

So.

Izuku Midoriya
If you REALLY wanted to make light of a situation
don't forget to bring a flashlight! :D :D :D
Ayyyyy
...HEY WHY ISN'T THERE A GUN FINGER EMOJI
oh wait hold on
[emoji.ghost]
I CAN DO THIS :D

There's no response. He isn't sure when All Might will actually *get* any of these messages, but no matter; Izuku keeps going. It's nice to be able to text his mentor like this.

It's nice to be *alive.*

Izuku Midoriya
Hey i found some cool emojis look.
[emoji.hand] [emoji.hand] [emoji.hand]
it be Shigaraki
gotta -hand- it to them for nailing his portrait
insert gun fingers
Hey why did Shigaraki cross the road

He didn't he made Kurogiri warp him there.
gun fingers part 2
I'm just gonna keep doing this until you reply.
Don't mind me~

Izuku Midoriya
[emoji.nurse]
Oh look it's Recovery Girl
No hold on
[emoji.anger]
Now it's Recovery Girl.
[emoji.skull_crossbones]
And this is me.
When Recovery Girl gets back.

Izuku Midoriya
Man I feel like a plank of wood.
Bored.
:) :) :) :) :)
***Wood* you believe it?**
Ayyyy.

He's typing something else *("I* nailed *that joke")* when the door bangs the wall to the far right of him, and his head whips around. He almost drops his phone in shock, fumbling with it for a moment or two until he has a secure grip on it again.

All Might—in his true form—is standing in the doorway, breathing like he'd run the whole way there. He's holding a phone in one hand, his other hand pressed flat on the door from when he'd thrown it open.

Izuku grins and raises a peace sign briefly. "Heya!" he says, then drops his hand back to his side. "Long time no see, I guess?" He shuts his eyes and laughs shakily, rubbing the back of his neck with his free hand. "I mean, I haven't seen you in a while but you've probably seen me. I'm sorry for worrying—"

All Might's arms encircle his shoulders suddenly, and Izuku's eyes snap open at once, the words getting stuck on a sudden lump in his throat. For a long moment, he doesn't say anything.

"...I'm fine," Izuku says, numb. "I-I'm really—"

"You scared me," All Might says. "You really, *really* scared me, kid. Just…" The arms around Izuku's shoulders tighten. "...Let me have this, alright?"

"...Okay."

He doesn't move for a long moment. And then he hugs his mentor back and buries his face in his shoulder, his eyes burning with tears.

They stay that way for a long time.

And then,

"Y'know," Izuku says, "I actually got offered a job once by a window cleaning company. It was weird, though, 'cause they wanted to hire me as a ghost."

"...Where are you going with this."

"Well, I turned them down, anyway. It wasn't something I could see myself doing."

There's a beat.

All Might doesn't groan or sigh, just embraces Izuku tighter. "I really, *really* missed that."

"What? My jokes?"

"Yes."

"...I'm taking that as my okay to bombard you with them."

"I have no objections."

Izuku gives a shaky laugh. "Wow, you must've been really worried—"

"I was."

Maybe it's the way he said it, or simply how straightforward the words were, but Izuku's teeth snap together immediately.

"...I'm fine."

"You are *now,* but...you weren't."

Izuku bites his lip.

And then, he pulls out of the embrace. He isn't sure he's ready to let go and he doesn't think All Might is either, but he feels like, right now, he has to.

"I'm fine," he says, looking All Might in the eye. "I wasn't before but I'm fine now. I'm okay."

All Might doesn't seem entirely convinced, and Izuku supposes he has every right not to be all things considered, but he nods.

"...Anyway…" All Might pulls up Recovery Girl's stool and takes a seat. "...How are you feeling?"

Izuku takes in a breath and lets it out in a rush. "It's been a rough past couple of days. I-I mean, I guess...I feel better than before. I have a headache and everything's kind of...sluggish, I guess, but I'm doing better."

All Might nods stiffly. "Yeah…I, ahhh...I met your mother earlier..."

Izuku stares at him, eyes wide. He thinks of his mother, protective and stern and the words that immediately flow out of his mouth are, *"And you're still alive?"*

He didn't mean to say it, but All Might doesn't notice, and he rubs the back of his neck awkwardly for a moment or two. "Well...she *did* slap me—"

"Are you serious."

"Yes, she did. She was extremely worried about you, my boy."

Izuku looks away, biting his lip. "My mom, she's, ahh...she's pretty protective of me," he says. "I mean, it's not a bad thing, I-I just…" He fiddles with the blanket for a second or two, trying to think of what to say.

"It's alright," All Might says. "I'm not upset, believe me. She had every right to do what she did. Oh—" He looks up suddenly, like he's just remembered something important. "I wanted to let you know, your classmates are fine. Worried about you like everyone, but they suffered no bodily harm."

Izuku lets out a sigh of relief. "T-That's good—" And then, he stops.

His eyes go wide. “W-Wait, Aizawa,” he says, lurching forward, a dizzying feeling of *dread* washing over him. “Aizawa-sensei and Thirteen, are they—”

“Calm down, calm down, they’re alright,” All Might says immediately, settling his hands on Izuku’s shoulders. “They’re alright. They’re both receiving treatment in the hospital at the moment, they’re going to be alright.”

Izuku lets out another sigh of relief—a longer, deeper one this time. “That’s...that’s good,” he says. “I’m glad…”

For a moment, he thinks about Aizawa. He’d been fast enough to stop Kurogiri from grievously wounding Thirteen, but he hadn’t been fast enough to keep the Nomu from smashing Aizawa’s face into the ground. When he thinks about it—when he remembers the sickening *crack* and the blood that followed—his stomach gives a lurch, so he tries to put it out of his mind quickly.

He can’t, not completely. He doesn’t think he’ll ever be able to.

“You gave us all a serious scare, kiddo,” All Might says, and Izuku gladly accepts the change of subject. “I’m glad you’re alright. We all are.”

Kiddo. All Might had called him “kiddo.” It makes Izuku think of something else, *someone* else, a person he doesn’t know but feels incredibly familiar with.

“Hey, All Might, erm...this...this might seem like an out of nowhere question, but—do you know anyone named Nana Shimura?”

All Might’s head snaps up, which is really all the answer Izuku needs. “My boy, how... *how do you know that name?”*

“W-Well…I-I…” Now that he thinks about it, it sounds crazy. “Y-You’re probably not going to believe me—”

“I will.”

“I-I mean, it sounds crazy even to me,” Izuku says. “I barely believe it, I just—”

“Midoriya, Nana Shimura was my predecessor.”

Izuku’s eyes go wide, and he stares, understanding but not computing.

“S-She was…she’s—”

“She’s…she’s a real person who lived, and…she’s a real person who died,” All Might says, and there’s a heaviness to his tone. He’s quick to move on. “The world never knew her name, my boy, never. How do *you?”*

Izuku’s tongue feels too thick for his mouth. His head is spinning. Nana Shimura. All Might’s predecessor. She’s *dead*—

“B-Before,” Izuku says, and he fumbles over the words in his haste to spit them out. “W-When I was, I mean, I think I was dying—”

(He doesn’t miss All Might’s wince, but he doesn’t comment on it, either.)

“—I heard her, in my head,” Izuku goes on. “O-Or, I mean, in my chest, I-I don’t know. It was all pretty confusing, I-I didn’t really get it, but…”

“You…” All Might looks just as shocked as Izuku feels. “…You spoke with her.”

Izuku nods. “Her, and…and a few others. I think—I think there were seven of them including her? Yeah, seven. They were kind of talking over each other, b-but I mea—”

He stops.

Seven.

He’d never made the connection before now.

Seven figures he’d unknowingly summoned at the USJ.

Seven voices within him, felt more than heard.

Seven people.

Seven holders.

Seven real people who’d lived and died.

“…You’re kidding me.” The words are out of his mouth before he registers speaking. “You’re *kidding me.* That means…One For All, the previous holders, t-they…you mean I—I…I can…”

All Might stares at him. It's hard to read his face.

"...Midoriya, my boy... *your Quirk doesn't make any sense."*

Izuku's mind is blank. "Believe me I know."

"Can you—talk to them still, right now?" All Might asks. "I mean—is there a way you *could,* or—"

"I have *no idea,"* Izuku says, his voice lowering to a sort-of whisper. "I-I mean, I could try, I guess—"

"No, no, wait," All Might tells him, reaching out and settling a hand on Izuku's shoulder. "If they aren't already talking to you, wait. Don't strain yourself too soon."

Oh, yeah. That's probably a good idea.

It's hard to think about this all—Izuku's headache goes up a notch, so he tries not to put too much thought into it. "So...the ghosts I summoned at the USJ, those were...those were the previous One For All holders, too."

All Might nods. He, too, seems eager to move on to another subject. "Yeah. I suppose it makes sense—One For All is raw power, and when combined with other Quirks, it makes them stronger. I think that's what happened before—One For All enhanced your own Quirk"

Izuku nods. He already assumed that much. "So, that's why, on the bus," Izuku says, "on the way to the USj—we went through a tunnel, and everyone started freaking out about my eyes."

"Oh. Because they glow?"

"Yea—wait, you noticed?"

"It isn't a very bright glow, but it's hard to miss."

"Well, according to them, it was a 'pretty bright glow' back on the bus," Izuku says. "They all started screaming."

"Oh—well, if it's a part of Dissociate, then yes, One For All definitely made it stronger."

Izuku sighs. "Great. I've always wanted flashlights for eyes."

"They can't be *that bright."*

“I know, I’m exaggerating. You know how people say ‘bright-eyed and bushy-tailed’? Maybe this is just me taking that whole ‘bright-eyed’ thing a little too seriously.”

“…”

“…Sorry, back on topic,” Izuku says, “how do you think…I mean, the previous holders…how did I summon them like that? And…why did it…” He glances down at himself briefly, remembers feeling like he was being burned alive. “…Why did it hurt me like that?”

“I have…a theory,” All Might answers. “It may or may not actually be correct, but it’s a theory.”

“Okay?”

“One For All is a physical Quirk,” All Might says, “but it’s also an extremely spiritual Quirk. Your thoughts, your feelings…they’re crucial elements when it comes to wielding the power. However, when you aren’t a *part* of your body, you lose that ‘physical’ aspect of One For All and are left with only the spiritual part of it.”

Izuku nods. He’s following so far.

“Now, tell me, kid,” All Might goes on, “what did it feel like? Summoning them?”

“I-I didn’t do it on purpose,” Izuku answers, turning away awkwardly. “I mean, I just…I wanted to save everyone. I didn’t want anyone to die, so…I just…I started running, and then I felt this…this weird rush of power, I guess. Sort of like—”

He freezes. In that moment, everything clicks.

“…Sort of like how I feel…when I use One For All.”

All Might nods. “Exactly,” he says. “Young Midoriya, I believe…when you use One For All as a ghost rather than as a physical person…that’s what happens. Rather than being strengthened physically, you’re strengthened spiritually, and the seven souls of the people who came before you…the seven souls of those who carried this power before you…you’re able to draw them out.”

Izuku stares down at his hands for a long, long time.

“…Why do I have to be the one with the confusing Quirk?” he asks

desperately, more to himself than anything. “So, wait—if using One For All as a ghost summons the previous users, then...the physical backlash…”

“It’s like breaking your bones in your physical body,” All Might says. “If summoning all seven past users is one hundred percent of the power, then summoning one is, say, ten percent.”

Izuku’s head is starting to hurt again.

“Also, at the USJ,” Al Might goes on, “when you summoned the past holders, their bodies were...fuzzy, for lack of a better word. Distorted. Which brings me to believe you weren’t actually using One For All at full power. Maybe—seventy percent, or eighty percent. If you used one hundred percent, then—”

Izuku snaps his fingers. “Then they’d be summoned as ghosts like the one I turn into! Still, y’know, *transparent,* but with more defined bodies.”

“That’s what I believe, yes.”

“That’s cool!” Izuku says, beaming. “I-I mean, if I can summon them—even if I summon just one of them, I mean—I think that’s really cool! Maybe I should—”

All Might’s hand on his shoulder stops him again. Izuku turns and looks at him for a moment.

“...Wait?”

All Might nods. “Wait. At least until Recovery Girl gives you the all clear. And even then, my boy...we have to be very, very careful with how you use this power. If only around seventy percent was enough to do *this* to you...”

He doesn’t need to finish. One hundred percent would probably destroy his spirit— *literally*.

“So...One For All,” Izuku says, if just to gather his thoughts out loud, “when I use it as a ghost, it...summons the past holders.”

“It would seem that way.”

“That’s…” Izuku pauses for a moment, trying to think of the word. “That’s *insane.”*

“Yeah. Don’t think about it too much right now, alright?” All Might reaches out and tousles his hair, mindful of the bandages around his forehead. “Like it or not, you’ve still got a ways to go before you’ve completely healed.”

“Yeah…okay.”

“Anyway.” All Might rises from his seat. “If you’re feeling up to it, you’ve got a couple of friends who have been worried sick about you. I’m sure they’d love to visit.”

Names come to mind immediately: Kirishima, Iida, Uraraka, Tsuyu…

Izuku nods, and All Might ruffles his hair one final time before turning back towards the door.

At the last second, though, Izuku calls out to him.

“I-I’m glad you’re okay, too, All Might.”

All Might pauses, hand poised towards the door handle.

“…Toshinori,” he says.

Izuku tilts his head. “Toshi…nori..?”

“That’s my name,” All Might says, turning towards Izuku again. He’s smiling. “When I’m in this form, feel free to call me Toshinori.”

Izuku blinks. “Tos…Toshinori…?”

He nods. Izuku thinks this over for just a moment; then, he beams. “I’ll remember that,” Izuku says. “Thank you, Toshinori-san!”

All Might—Toshinori—smiles and turns toward the door again.

“Also, Izuku.”

Izuku stops. It’s the first time All Might—Toshinori—has called him by his first name.

“…There are real, true monsters in this world,” Toshinori says slowly. “And *you,* my boy, are *definitely* not one of them. Please…I want you to promise me that you’ll never call yourself a monster again.”

Izuku’s breath gets stuck in his throat. There’s a long moment of blank, empty silence.

"...O-Okay," Izuku says quietly. "I-I'll try."

Toshinori nods, satisfied, and leaves the infirmary. The door clicks shut behind him.

Izuku stares at the closed door for a long moment—and then, he flops back on the bed with a heaving exhale, his ribs and head throbbing. His bell jingles cheerily at the movement.

He shuts his eyes. He's exhausted, but his thoughts are running rampid. He's thinking about the previous One For All users, how he'd been able to speak with them before, how he'd *summoned* them without even realizing what he was doing…

He takes in a long, deep breath to calm himself.

"Is anyone there?" he calls softly. Within him, he's trying with all his might, pulling at One For All without activating it. For a long moment, there's nothing.

And then there's something.

A small, gentle tug at his chest. A soft but deliberate pull. Voices fill his mind.

"Ayyy, lookie there! He lives!"

"Hello, sweetie. We're glad you're alright."

"You scared the living crap out of Toshinori there, kiddo. Actually, I'm pretty sure you scared the living crap out of all of us."

"Hahaha, you said living *crap. We've all been dead for years."*

"You know what I mean—"

"Hey, Midoriya, my dude, my buddy, I have this great joke—oh hold on, I can't remember—c'mon, don't do this to me—I've been working on this for hours—"

"Daaang, your memory ain't what it used to be. I swear, it gets worse every day."

"I'd like to see how good you *remember stuff when you've been dead for a few decades."*

"We've all been dead for a few decades. You ain't special."

“Agh, it’s too early for this…”

Izuku isn’t sure why he smiles. He doesn’t know any of these people personally, but he’s connected with them through One For All, so he feels more like he’s talking with old friends than total strangers.

“So, you guys...you all carried One For All before me,” Izuku says quietly, not because he needs confirmation, but because it’s a way of collecting his thoughts out loud. “And now...I can talk to you all…?”

“Apparently.”

“Dunno, kid, what do you think?”

“Oh, don’t be rude—”

“HELL YEAH WE FREAKING ROCKED *ONE FOR ALL!”*

“Can you please quiet down—”

“But...how does that work?” Izuku says, and the voices within him still. “I-I mean, earlier...when I was talking with All Mi—I mean, Toshinori-san, you weren’t there—?”

“Oh, yeah, kiddo, we were there.” That’s Nana’s voice, he knows that one.

“I’m very sorry we didn’t say anything. We thought it would be best for you to have some time to think without hearing us in your head.” A woman’s voice, softer and gentler—like a worried mother.

“Believe us, we’re just as confused as you are, boyo.” A loose voice, male. He has an accent Izuku isn’t familiar with. *“I’m preeeeetty sure what happened back at that crazy facility was One For All combinin’ with your own Quirk. The two finally merged together and formed this ‘bridge’ between us. That’s why you can talk to us now when you couldn’t before.”*

“Duuuude.” A kid. He sounds young. Izuku wonders how old he is.

“Wellp, if that ain’t hella confusing I dunno what is.” Another woman, bold and loud. *“Hey, Midoriya, you’re a smart one, what do you think about all this?”*

“I think…” Izuku pauses. “...That I really want to go to sleep again.”

“Oh ouch, that kind of hurt me.”

"Y'know, kiddo, if you feel like you need to get some sleep, you can. I know you wanna see your friends, but they'd rather you rest and recover than push yourself to stay awake for them."

He knows Nana has a point, but he shakes his head. "No, I'm fine," he says quietly—he has no idea when his friends are going to get here, after all, and the last thing he wants is for them to overhear him supposedly talking to himself. "I'll sleep later."

"If that's what you want, kiddo…"

"Sweetheart, you really are precious, but you're still recovering from your injuries, you need to rest."

"Toshinori, I'm sorry, but your kid is a frickin' IDIOT when it comes to takin' care of himself. I'll have y'all know, back in my *day—"*

"YOU'VE BEEN DEAD FOR FIFTY YEARS."

"Okay first of all rude, *second, that is a LOW BLOW, KARIN."*

"THAT'S NOT MY NAME AND YOU KNOW IT, JERK."

"W-When my friends get here," Izuku says, and the voices cease, "I'm…gonna have to ask that, y'know…you guys just…stay quiet…?"

"Oh yeah, for sure, kiddo."

"It's alright, we won't bother you. Enjoy your talk with your friends, sweetie."

"No prob, dude."

"We'll just hang 'round—ta be completely honest with ya, boyo, none of us have a clue what's goin' on with you and your Quirk and One For All. We'll keep to ourselves. If ya ever need us, though, we'll be here."

"Thanks," Izuku says—and then, the door flings open. The tug in his chest disappears, as do the previous holders of One For All, and he sits up again and turns toward the door.

They're there, in the doorway, frozen in place and staring like they've never seen him before—Kirishima, Uraraka, Iida, and Tsuyu. Izuku beams, and his heart gives a soft little lurch. He'd really, *really* missed them…

"BUDDY!" Kirishima shouts, and promptly hurls himself across the

room, stopping only when his arms wrap around Izuku's shoulders. The embrace is tight, almost too tight, but Izuku doesn't protest.

And then Uraraka glomps them, and then Tsuyu, and then Iida's arms wrap around them all, gentler, but just as firm. Izuku laughs giddily, tears burning his eyes, and he hugs the four of them as tightly as he can.

He really, really, *really* missed them.

They pull back all at once, and Izuku brushes away his tears. "I-I'm glad to see you guys," he says, smiling. "I-I...I was worried."

"Wait, *you* were worried?" Kirishima says, staring at him. "You. In the infirmary with broken bones and a concussion. Are worried. About *us.* People who are, thanks to you, *completely fine."*

Izuku nods. "Yep."

"Aww, Deku," Uraraka says thickly. "That's...that's sweet, but—I mean, you…"

Izuku smiles faintly, then shakes his head. "I'm alright," he says. "I promise, I know it was bad before—"

"You were puking blood," Tsuyu says.

This brings on an immediate reaction from the others, like clockwork.

"YOU WERE *WHAT!?"*

"I-I'm okay now, though!" Izuku says immediately, waving his hands back and forth. The IV needle tugs at his skin, and he stops quickly. "I-I promise, I'm completely fine now.

There's a long moment. The tension is so thick it'd take a chainsaw to cut through it.

Iida looks down suddenly, his hands balling into fists at his sides. "You lied to me," he says, his voice heavy. "You said you were going to protect everyone, and you *didn't."*

Izuku blinks. "I-I did, though," he says hoarsely. "I-I mea—"

"You were included in that 'everyone,' Midoriya."

"...Oh."

Izuku looks down. He isn't entirely sure how he should respond to that.

"I...I-I'm sor—"

"Don't be like that, Midori-chan," Tsuyu interrupts, and she reaches out, settling her hand on his forearm. It's the first time she's said or done anything since hugging him. "We're just glad you're okay. But don't do anything reckless like that again."

She isn't afraid of me, Izuku thinks suddenly. *She saw what I did at the USJ, and she isn't afraid of me.*

"She's right, buddy," Kirishima says, reaching out and ruffling Izuku's hair. "You seriously messed yourself up. Gotta stop doin' that, okay?"

Izuku's eyes burn again, and he rubs them with the backs of his hands. "T-Thanks," he says—he figures, right now, his friends would appreciate his thanks more than his sorry.

They sit back and talk after that. His friends don't ask about his Quirk, they don't ask about what happened at the USJ; no, they talk about pointless, lighthearted nonsense—like classroom shenanigans, how they want to spend summer, pranks they've pulled on people in the past, *accidental* pranks they've pulled on people…

They don't bring up the fight, and Izuku is glad. He'll tell them all in his own time; for now, he'll relish in this peace and warmth as much as he can.

And he isn't *positive,* but he's pretty sure that, as he talks and laughs with his friends, he hears one (or several) of the voices in his head go, *"D'awwwwww."*

Recovery Girl isn't nearly as mad as he'd expected her to be.

She's stern, and she scolds him—scolds him for being reckless and not thinking things through when he ought to, scolds him for hurting himself—but after that, the anger is gone.

"I'll yell at you more later," she says, when Izuku mentions it, "when I'm not so glad you're alright."

Izuku supposes that's only fair.

"But I would like to talk to you about something," Recovery Girl says,

sitting down on her stool. “Your Quirk. What do you know about it?”

“Oh, um…that’s a lot to go over all at once,” Izuku says, mumbling the last bit to himself. “Oh, wait, actually, I have a notebook at home. I’ve been documenting everything about my Quirk ever since I was little.”

“Have you, now?” Recovery Girl says, and he nods. “Bring that to me as soon as you can, alright? Your Quirk, as you now know, is extremely dangerous.”

Izuku looks down at himself, at the infirmary sheets and the IV needle in his wrist.

“…Yeah,” he says heavily, “I know.”

“Well, anyway,” Recovery Girl says, changing the subject, “because of what happened, once you’ve recovered some, I’d like to run a test or two. Nothing major—I’ll just have you leave your body here for a while so I can monitor your heart rate, your breathing, that sort of thing. That way I know what’s normal for you when you’re out of your body.”

“Oh, o-okay,” Izuku says, nodding. “Sounds good.”

She writes something on a notepad on the table. “I’m sending you home today,” she says, “but, granted you aren’t in pain, feel free to come to school tomorrow. You’ve been in this infirmary too many times, I swear…”

He’s not sure he’s supposed to hear that last part, so he doesn’t comment on it. “Thanks for everything,” he says instead. “I—”

“You can thank me,” she cuts in, “by not getting hurt like this again.”

Izuku’s teeth snap together.

He nods.

Izuku spends that evening at home updating his Disassociate notebook. He doesn’t include the information regarding One For All for obvious reasons—he can talk to Recovery Girl about that in person, but should the notebook be found by another teacher or his classmates, well…he’d be in trouble.

For the most part, the ex-One For All users don’t say much. They make a couple comments here and there, but nothing too distracting.

That is, until...

"Sweetheart, it's a school night, and you're still recovering, please go to bed —"

"I digress. The kid's a MORON."

"Dude, I get that a huge part of being a teen is staying up to ungodly hours, but this time, man, go to bed."

"Kiddo, seriously, get some sleep. You're pushing it hard enough as it is."

"DAGNABBIT, GO TO BED ALREADY."

"I'll *go* to bed!" Izuku says, slamming his pencil beside his notebook on the desk. "Let me finish this page, alright? It's really hard to do when you're all yelling at me."

"Oh, is that so?"

"Well then~"

"Ya shouldn't've told us that, boyo."

Izuku takes up his pencil again. "I'm drowning you out," he says. "This is me, ignoring you."

"GO TO BED GO TO BED GO TO BED, BED, BED—"

"The fitnessgram pacer test is a multistage aerobic capacity test that—"

"Go to sleeeeeep, now and reeeeest—"

"Some. BODY once told me—"

"La la la la laaaa, I can't hear ya over how FRICKIN' STUPID THIS KID IS—"

"NEVER GONNA GIVE YOU UP, NEVER GONNA LET YOU DOWN~"

"Hey wait you haven't had any water in a while, you should probably do that too—"

"THE YEARS START COMIN' AND THEY DON'T STOP COMIN'—"

Izuku tries tuning it out and updating the notebook, but it's hard to do when he has seven conflicting voices in his head all yelling something

different, and eventually all Izuku can think is *hey now, you're an all-star, get your game on—*

"OKAY, FINE!" he finally relents, slamming the pen down on the desk and closing the notebook. "I'll go to bed, just stop!"

"Yay!"

"Nice choice, kiddo."

"You really are too stubborn, dear. Just remember, your notebook will be there for you when you wake up. You can write more then."

"Ya finally decide to take care of yourself, boyo."

"Brings a tear to my eye…"

"Mission accomplished, my dudes! High-five!"

"…"

"…Or, y'know, we could not do that."

"Seriously, go to sleep."

"DRINK SOME DAMN WATER FIRST, THOUGH."

"OkayokayIwill!" Izuku says, if just to shut them up, and as soon as he drinks some water (they won't leave him alone until he does), he hops into bed.

He doesn't go to sleep yet, though. Instead, he grabs his phone off the nightstand and turns it on.

"Oh no, oh no, he's turning on the electronic devices, we're gonna be here forever—"

"Kids these days and their smartphones, I swear. When I *was your age—"*

"I'm just sending a text," Izuku says. "I promise I'll go to bed right after this."

"You texting Toshinori, kiddo?"

Izuku nods.

"…Hey, can you tell him somethin' from me?"

“Sure thing. What’s up?”

Later on that night as he’s walking home, Toshinori’s phone goes off. He pulls it from his pocket and looks.

Izuku Midoriya
Hey so, I’m going to school tomorrow.
I’m bringing my ’Dissociate’ notebook for Recovery Girl.
I didn’t put down anything about One For All.
Just thought you’d like to know.

Toshinori
Kid, you should be asleep.

Izuku Midoriya
OH NOT YOU TOO

Toshinori
?????

Izuku Midoriya
The ex-OFA users have been screaming at me to go to bed for like the past hour.

Toshinori
They’re right.

Izuku Midoriya
:(

Toshinori
No, stop that.

Izuku Midoriya
:(:(:(:(:(

Toshinori
Kid

Izuku Midoriya
Oh wait!
Nana wants me to tell you hi! :D

(Toshinori chokes.)

Izuku Midoriya
She says hello and wants me to send you this:
[emoji.heart] [emoji.heart] [emoji.heart]
She specifically said “send a hundred of them” but
HEY CAN Y’ALL STOP SCREAMING AT ME FOR THIRTY SECONDS
oh whoops I typed that.
sorry that was meant for the voices in my head.
Ok I have to go to bed, they’re all really mad at me now.
They threatened to sing “Let it Go” on loop for three hours straight if I don’t sleep now.
Bye! See you tomorrow! :D

[IZUKU MIDORIYA IS OFFLINE]

Toshinori stares at his phone for a long, long moment.

And then, he smiles softly and keeps walking.

Chapter End Notes

Find me on tumblr! :D

IN CASE IT DIDN’T MAKE SENSE:

-Izuku can talk to the previous OFA users now because, during that moment in the USJ when he thought, *I want to save him,* he subconsciously activated One For All as a ghost for the first time and forced the two Quirks to merge.
-When using One For All as a ghost, Izuku can summon the past users. More detail on this when the time comes.
-Upon popular demand, I will be giving Izuku a service dog in the next chapter. More information when the time comes! :D
NEW EDIT BECAUSE CONFUSION:
-The ex-OFA users know recent media because Izuku knows recent media; to quote a reader, "they're cognizant of everything that goes on with the current wielder." I've always kinda head-canoned that anyway; sorry for not mentioning it sooner!!
-Izuku will be getting a service dog specifically trained for people with fainting disorders--dogs trained to stay with their person and/or bark for help if/when necessary.

Also whekajdhkajsd I was SUPER BLOWN AWAY ONCE AGAIN by all the comments last chapter. Seriously, you guys, thank you all so much!! I think I responded to all of them--I tried my best at least hwjkahsdk. I love you all!!! <3 <3 <3

Until next time, go beyond! PLUS ULTRA!!!!!!!!! :D

Right Hand Man

Chapter Summary

"Right Hand Man" from Hamilton

“Dying is easy, young man. Living is harder.”

Chapter Notes

THERE'S AAAAARRRRRTTTTTTTT--

carolklav

rip-aizawa

abyssal-glory

janekay-arts

kug-the-carrot

judgeless-rose

THANK YOU ALL SO MUCH YOU'RE ALL SUPER AMAZING!!!!! :D ENJOY THE CHAPTER!! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Booooooy that shirt does not *match those shoes.”*

“Those shoes don’t match anything.”

“Don’t listen to them, sweetie, you look wonderful.”

“Aw look at ‘im, off to go fight people. These kids, I’m tellin’ ya, they grow up so fast. Why, when I *was a boy…”*

“Dude, it’s been decades, get over it already.”

“Shut up, Greg.”

“That’s not...y’know what, I’m not even gonna try anymore.”

“Is this how it’s always gonna be with you guys?” Izuku asks, slinging his backpack over is shoulder. “Can you...c-can you maybe calm

down? Let me have a normal morning, please?"

"Hey, the kid's right." Izuku breathes a sigh of relief and thanks his lucky stars that Nana is there as a voice of reason. *"If we keep talking, we're gonna end up messing him up in class or something. Not to mention it'd be pretty awkward when he's talking to other people."*

"Guess you're right. Sorry, boyo. We'll be quiet."

"Thanks," Izuku says, and he puts on his choker necklace and bell, snatches his Dissociate notebook off the desk, and heads out of the room.

Mom is waiting for him by the door, wringing her hands together. "Izuku, are you sure you should be going to school today?" she asks, concerned. "I mean, after all that happened...if you want to take a few more days here to rest…"

"She's got a point, dude, maybe--OW!"

"Shut up, remember!?"

"Oh, right, sorry…"

Izuku smiles and shakes his head, ignoring the voices for now. "I'm okay, Mom, I promise," he says. "I'll come home if I need to, okay?"

She doesn't seem completely convinced, and of course she doesn't. When he'd come home yesterday, she'd been frantic, asking him a million questions at once and only calming down after hearing that, yes, Recovery Girl said he was fine, and yes, he's sore but alright. She'd made him katsudon for dinner, a comfort food, and he'd thanked her profusely.

Now, she still has that same worry in her eyes, although there's no frenzied panic like there was yesterday, and he can't blame her.

"Mom."

Izuku takes her hands in his, and as soon as she meets his eyes, he smiles.

"I'm okay, okay?" he promises, and he means it. "I'll be fine, don't worry."

She bites her lip, then nods. "If you're sure, Izuku…"

“I’m sure.” He pauses, thinks of something, then smiles again. “When I get home tonight,” he says, “there’s something I need to talk to you about, if you aren’t too busy.”

“Oh, sure,” she answers, nodding quickly. “Is it…is something wrong, Izuku?”

Izuku shakes his head. “Nope, nothing at all,” he says, beaming. “Just something about Dissociate and One For All that I realized recently. It’s really cool, I’ll tell you all about it after school.”

“Ooooh, he’s talkin’ ‘bout us.”

“Awww, shucks, he thinks we’re cool--”

“HELL YEAH *WE ARE!”*

“Shh!”

Mom smiles at him and nods. “Alright,” she says, and Izuku bends down to let her kiss his forehead. “Good luck today. And take care of yourself.”

“I will,” Izuku says--and then, the voices of the past holders are talking again.

“No worries, Mamadoriya, we’ll take care of that.”

“Ya hear that, boyo? We now have full permission to motherhen ya.”

“Hey, guys, aren’t we supposed to be quiet?”

“Crap, Greg, you’re right.”

“Okay, now you’re just being rude--”

“Well, I’m off!” Izuku says, turning towards the door. “Bye, Mom!”

“Bye, sweetheart! Good luck!”

Izuku heads out, pulling the door shut behind him.

He’s a tad late; he’d slept in on accident (he only woke up when one of the ex-holders screeched, *“HOLY CRAP YOU’RE FREAKING LATE”),* but it doesn’t matter. His teachers will understand, he hopes; even though Recovery Girl healed him, he’s still sore and exhausted.

The U.A. has never looked more intimidating than it does at this moment, as Izuku heads up the front steps and continues inside, toward his classroom.

Well, either the U.A. has never looked so big, or Izuku has never felt so small.

His friends hadn't asked about it before, when he was in the infirmary recovering from his injuries, but there's no reason why they wouldn't ask now, and Izuku knows he has to tell them. He has to tell them the truth.

"Monster!"

"Creepy!"

"He keeps sneaking up on me, I don't like it!"

"What a weird kid."

"You can't become a hero with a coward's Quirk."

"You can't become a hero with a Quirk that scares people."

He doesn't want to. He doesn't want to tell them the truth, he doesn't want to tell them what he *is*--

"Kiddo, remember what Toshi said."

Izuku stops, one foot still in the air. He's nearing Class 1-A now; he can already see the door from here.

"What?" Izuku asks, once he's sure no one else is around to see him talking to himself.

"I don't know what you're thinking," Nana says, *"but I can feel bits and pieces of what you're feeling. You're scared your friends will reject you, right?"*

Izuku swallows thickly. His voice is small when he says,

"...Yes."

"They won't. Those kids adore *you, Izuku, you're just as much their friend as they are yours. You saw how worried they were about you when you were hurt, and remember, this was after they watched you fight off villains as a ghost."*

“But…t-telling them now,” Izuku says, his breath catching in his throat. “Actually…a-actually *explaining* what I *am--”*

“Stop calling yourself ‘what,’” Nana snaps, suddenly angry. *“You are a* human being, *Midoriya Izuku, don’t you* dare *degrade yourself like that.”*

There’s a lump in his throat now and he can’t swallow it.

“…Tell them, kiddo,” Nana says, suddenly much softer, and he can feel her smile. *“Tell them all about you. Tell them the things you can do, tell them all about your power. They won’t reject you, I promise.”*

“H-How…how do you know?” Izuku ventures.

“Because I watched them barrel into the infirmary to see you,” Nana answers. *“I watched them barrel in there, and I watched them hug you like you were the most precious thing in the world to them. They aren’t going to reject you, kiddo, I know it. They love you.”*

Izuku’s eyes burn. He opens his mouth to say something else, but the other ex-holders come back, loud and resounding and drowning out the rest of his thoughts:

“Knock ‘em dead, boyo!”

“Oh, but please don’t knock yourself dead, sweetheart, you have to stop doing that--”

“Go, dude! Show them what you’re made of!”

“YOU’VE GOT THIS, KID! I BELIEVE IN YOU!”

“You’re all way too chipper for eight in the morning…”

“If they do *reject you, well, you never needed them anywa--”*

“They won’t, kiddo. Just go in there, be yourself, and don’t worry.”

Izuku sucks in a long, deep breath. “Okay,” he says, raising his head. “I’m gonna do it.”

“WHOO!”

“AWESOME-SAUCE!”

“Please, never say that again--”

“Okay, y’all, time to shut up now and let the boy do his thing.”

“Alright, sounds good.”

“Good luck, kiddo! You’ve got this!”

“Talk more later!”

Their presences vanish within his chest, and Izuku covers the remaining distance between him and the classroom door. He waits for a long moment, his breath stuck in his throat.

Remember what Toshi said. That was what Nana told him. Izuku thinks back, searching--he doesn’t have to look far.

“Please…I want you to promise me that you’ll never call yourself a monster again.”

Izuku swallows, raises his head, and pulls the classroom door open.

His classmates--all nineteen of them--are there already, leaning on each other’s desks and chatting noisily with each other. He stares, watching; none of them look in his direction.

Oh, he thinks. *That’s right, I’ve got no presence.*

He has his bell, sure, but everyone’s talking too loudly to hear it. For a moment or two, he stands there, not entirely sure what to do. Should he say something? Should he go take a seat at his desk?

“Buddy, I know we said we’d be quiet, but you’re staring like a deer in the headlights. Stop worrying, you’ve got this.”

Izuku takes in a breath. He touches his bell, just for a moment, and remembers the day Kirishima gave it to him.

“Good morning,” he says loudly--louder than he’d meant to, looking back on it.

The reactions are instantaneous and all at once; Kaminari lets out a shriek and topples backwards off the desk he’d been perched on; the shriek is echoed by a few other classmates, and they trip and fall and whirl around to stare at Izuku.

Izuku stares back, smiling embarrassedly. If there’s one thing he hates, it’s being in the spotlight.

"...Not dead?" he quips, and his smile feels forced and painful, even to him.

It doesn't take long for his classmates to get over their shock, and then suddenly they're all talking again, everyone at once.

"Hey, dude, you're back!" Kirishima says, grinning. "I'm glad you're okay!"

"Deku!" Uraraka smiles and races up to him; Iida follows with Tsuyu, walking. "Are you better now? I mean, your injuries?"

Izuku nods, smiling. "I'm fine," he says. "I'm sorry for worrying you all."

"Nah, it's fine," says Kirishima, waving him off. "We're just glad you're okay. Great to have you back."

"They were telling us all about what you did at the USJ!" Kaminari chimes in unexpectedly. "You taking on the warp-gate villain like that so Iida could escape and go get help? That's crazy!"

"Shigaraki," Tsuyu reminds, "don't forget Shigaraki."

"Oh, right!" Sero says, nodding. "You scared off Shigaraki, too! Well, I guess I shouldn't expect anything less from the dude who came first in the entrance exam, but I mean--man!" He shakes his head and whistles. "I really underestimated you! I thought, y'know, all you could do was break your arms, but…"

Here goes, Izuku thinks, taking in a deep, deep breath.

"That's...that's part of it," Izuku says, rubbing the back of his neck. "I'd hate to *break* it to you--"

(There's a long, collective groan, plus a couple cackles from Kirishima.)

"--But, yeah, that isn't all I can do," Izuku goes on. "I have, erm…" He's planned all of this out ahead of time, but he doesn't really know whether his friends will accept this as an answer. "...Ahhh...maybe it'd be easier if I just...showed you."

"Um...okay?" Ashido frowns. "Go for it."

Izuku sucks in a deep, shaky breath. He's dreaded doing this since the day of the Quirk Apprehension test, and now he's here, and he has to

do it. He's scared and he doesn't want to, but he doesn't have a choice now.

He drops.

It's surprisingly easy; his nervousness makes leaving his body a remarkably simple task. His body hits the floor and his spirit hovers over it; Uraraka and Ashido let out a small shriek, and everyone else stares, shocked.

There's a beat.

And then the panic starts.

"HOLY CRAP!" Kirishima shrieks, leaping backwards. "Was that...was that *supposed* to happen!?"

"Midoriya!?" Iida kneels by his body on the floor and shakes him. "Midoriya, are you alright!?"

Sero and Kaminari run around in circles and eventually bash into each other. Ashido hollers that she's going to get Recovery Girl and makes a mad dash for the door. As for the rest of them, they're all screaming and talking and yelling at once, and Izuku can't make anything out clearly.

"W-W-Wait, no, I-I'm fine!" Izuku calls, and his classmates screech to a halt, everyone stopping what they're doing at once. Their heads snap up towards the sound of his voice, but of course they can't see him. "I-I swear I'm fine! Watch!"

He zooms back into his body; there's a jerk, and then he's back in his body where he belongs. He sits up; Iida's hands hover by him, and his classmates swarm around anxiously.

"Holy…" Jirou starts, then stops and breathes a huge, heaving sigh of relief. "Dangit, don't do that again. You dropped so *fast…"*

"S-Sorry, i-it's, ahh…" Izuku rubs a soon-to-be bruise on his head. He really needs to stop dropping so suddenly like that, it's not good for his health. "I-It's a part of my Quirk, s-see. I-It's the Quirk I was born with."

Kirishima comes forward again. He looks more relieved than shocked now. "So, wait--you did that on purpose? You have two Quirks?"

“Umm, b-basically,” Izuku answers, pushing himself to his feet. Iida stands by him, ready to catch him if he drops again. “I was born with one, but the other one--the, ah, the one that keeps breaking my arms--that one’s...ah...it’s...it’s complicated. I got it a couple weeks before I came to high school. It’s some freak mutation, I-I think.”

Not really a lie.

“So that explains why you can’t use it without breaking yourself,” Yaoyorozu muses, cradling her chin in her hand. “Interesting. It never had the chance to develop fully so you can’t use it without inflicting bodily harm on yourself.”

Izuku nods. “I-I know it sounds crazy,” he says, “the whole...the whole ‘two Quirks’ thing, but--”

“Dude, our classmate literally has a bird head,” Sero deadpans. “It’s not that weird.”

Tokoyami frowns at him.

“S-Sorry, but it’s true!”

“He’s right, Midori-chan, it isn’t all that strange,” Tsuyu says, tapping a finger to her chin. “Todoroki has two Quirks, too.”

Izuku lets out a sigh of relief. Okay, okay, this is a good thing, no one’s suspicious.

Wait. Todoroki?

Izuku raises his head, and Tsuyu points. At the back of the class sits a boy Izuku’s only ever seen in passing, a boy with dual colored hair and mismatched eyes. He stares at Izuku with a flat, cold expression, and Izuku, for the life of him, can’t figure out why.

“So, wait, this other Quirk,” Uraraka says, and Izuku turns towards her. “The one you were born with, what is it exactly…?”

“Oh, my mom and I started calling it ‘Dissociate,’ or ‘Dissociation,’” Izuku answers readily. Anything to get off the subject of One For All. “Basically, I can leave my physical body as a ghost and float around like that. I can usually control it, but sometimes when I’m overwhelmed I just…”

“‘Tootaloos,’” Ashido offers, wiggling her fingers in a small, cheerful

wave.

Izuku blinks. "...Basically, yeah."

"So, when you're a 'ghost'…" Kirishima puts quotation marks around the word with his fingers, "can you, um, do you actually *go through* stuff, or…?"

Izuku blinks again. Honestly, he'd expected fear and shock from his classmates, not this... *curiosity*.

"As a rule, yes," Izuku explains, fumbling only slightly, "but I can hold onto physical things if I concentrate. Like, watch."

He slips out of his body again and Iida surges forward to catch him before he hits the floor. Izuku, as a ghost, pulls a notebook out of his backpack and raises it for his classmates to see.

"I can hold onto stuff, like this," Izuku says, waving the notebook around; his classmates' eyes follow it, like he's hypnotizing them. "But I can't do it for very long or it makes me sick when I actually get back into my body."

He drops the notebook and enters his body again; Iida lets him go, and Izuku straightens up. His stomach churns, but only for a second.

"Nice," Jirou says. "That's pretty dang cool, Midoriya."

"Seriously, though!" Satou says, grinning. "Think of all the stuff you could do with that! Stealth missions, sneaking around places, not to mention a great 'element of surprise' for people who don't know it's coming!"

"Oh, I get it now!" Kaminari says, snapping his fingers. "So *that's* how you came first in the entrance exam! What'd you do? Did you, like, go inside the robots and tear them up from the inside, or…?"

"U-Um, yeah, that's exactly what I did--"

"COOL!"

"That reminds me, Midori-chan," Tsuyu says, turning to him. "At the USJ, when you went at Shigaraki...there were people with you."

Izuku blanches. *Oh...I forgot she'd seen that…*

"Wait, really?" Kirishima asks, turning to him. "I didn't know that.

What happened?"

Izuku lets out a shaky laugh and rubs the back of his head. "I, erm, I may have accidentally...summoned some dead people…?"

There's a beat.

"YOU WHO WHAT!?" comes the explosion, and Izuku takes a step backwards, waving his hands back and forth.

"I-It's just another part of my Quirk!" he says frantically. "I-I didn't realize I could do it until that moment, but...yeah."

"Dude, that's…!" Kaminari's eyes are wide as saucers. "That's *really cool!* I mean, freaking *horrifying,* but also super cool!"

Izuku takes another step back, overwhelmed. "W-Well, I can't do it all the time. I-I mean, you all saw what it did to me, at least…"

"Yeah, that's right," Tsuyu says, nodding. "So don't do it again."

Izuku nods, but he isn't sure he means it. All of this still feels unreal to him, to be completely honest. He'd been expecting fear and shock and horror from his classmates, but instead, all he's gotten so far…

...Is curiosity. And maybe even *admiration.*

"You guys…" Izuku bites his lip, and all eyes are on him in an instant. "You aren't...freaked out at all…?"

"What?" Uraraka frowns at him, looking confused. "Oh, yeah, I mean, we're all freaked out, but it's just another Quirk, isn't it? And what you did with it at the USJ was super cool, too! Beating up Kurogiri like that...he didn't know what hit him!"

"Literally!" chimes in Kirishima.

"Like they said," says Yaoyorozu. "The Quirk itself may be unsettling, but that doesn't change how we see you. You don't have to worry about that."

"If you were using your power to hurt people, that'd be one thing," Iida says, straightening his glasses, "but, Midoriya...I've only ever seen you use this power to *protect* others. No matter what kind of Quirk you have, that fact alone is admirable."

"We're not gonna shun you just because your Quirk is creepy," Jirou

says casually. “We’re all aiming to be heroes here. And anyway, it’s not like you have a say in what kind of Quirk you’re born with.”

“Hey, y’all, let’s have a round of applause for my buddy here!” Kirishima says unexpectedly. “Fighting off the warp gate jerk and scarin’ off Hand-Faced McStupid Looking!”

“Hand-Faced Mc--”

Sero’s choked laughter is swallowed up by a round of applause, and Izuku stands there, staring, overwhelmed but oddly… *okay.*

“See? What’d I tell ya, kiddo,” Nana’s voice hums in his mind, and he can feel her smile, her *joy. “You’ve got yourself some true friends, here.”*

“HERE, HERE! Cheers to Class 1-A!”

“TO CLASS 1-A!”

Izuku eyes are burning, and it takes every part of him to not let the tears fall.

“…Thank you,” he says, rubbing at his eyes as his classmates clap and whoop. His voice cracks and breaks in a million different places, and a few tears run down his face. *“T-Thank you.”*

Aizawa’s face is mostly hidden by bandages, and his arms are in slings around his shoulders. Izuku is shocked at first, and so are his classmates; Iida in particular stands up and asks Aizawa why he’s here teaching and not resting, to which Aizawa responds that he’s fine and then continues with homeroom anyway. He says there’s nothing to discuss and sends them off to their next class.

“Not you, Midoriya,” Aizawa says, as Izuku gathers his things from his desk and prepares to leave the classroom. “Stay here. There’s something I need to discuss with you.”

“O-Okay,” Izuku says, nodding. The others go on ahead without him, and he stays behind with his homeroom teacher. Alone with Aizawa, he feels suddenly intimidated.

“A-Are you sure you should be here?” Izuku asks hesitantly, the moment the door shuts behind the last of his classmates leaving the room. “I-I mean, your injuries…shouldn’t you be resting?”

Aizawa gives him a look--or, as best a look he can give considering his

face is covered in bandages. “You of all people have no right to ask that question, Midoriya.”

Izuku bites his lip. Seeing his teacher now, covered in bandages even after receiving heavy treatment from a hospital...it leaves him with an empty, hollow feeling in his chest and sick feeling in his stomach.

Aizawa takes in a breath to say something, but Izuku barrels onwards.

“I’m sorry,” he blurts, before he can stop himself. “I-I’m sorry. At the USJ, before...b-before the Nomu, before he did that--”

“Midoriya.”

“--I knew something bad was going to happen, I-I could feel it, I-I just, I couldn’t, I tried--”

“Midoriya.”

“I couldn’t get there in time, I-I wasn’t fast enough, I couldn’t--I’m sorry, it’s my fault this happened to you, I’m sorry, I’m--”

“Midoriya, *shut up.”*

Izuku’s teeth snap together.

“It’s not your fault,” Aizawa says sharply. “The only thing you did wrong was charging into battle like some kind of madman. You’re a child, you don’t have to carry the world on your shoulders. Leave that to your teachers for now.”

Izuku takes in a breath, but doesn’t argue. He’ll always feel guilty about this, he knows that; even though the logical, reasonable part of him knows that there was nothing he could have done, the closer, more sentimental part of him screams the exact opposite.

“I want to talk to you about the Sports Festival,” Aizawa says, and Izuku raises his head and listens. “We’re planning on holding it in two weeks, granted you’re alright with that.”

Izuku tilts his head a little, confusion momentarily replacing the hollow feeling of guilt. “Why ask me...?”

“You were most affected by the USJ incident,” Aizawa answers, like it’s obvious. “Usually, if there were no student casualties, we’d hold the festival regardless of the situation. However, in light of what happened to you, if you don’t feel safe we’ll postpone it for now. So?

What do you think?"

Izuku barely has to think about it. "I-I think we should still do it!" he says, nodding. "I-I mean, everyone looks forward to it every year, don't they? Plus, backing down from such a big event now...the villains could see it as a weakness on U.A.'s part, right?"

Aizawa nods. "Alright, then," he says; he doesn't ask Izuku if he's sure, doesn't ask him for more clarification. "In that case, Midoriya, you might want to start planning your opening speech."

Izuku stiffens.

"...Aizawa-sensei?"

"Yeah?"

"How hard would it be for you to launch me into the sun?"

"Not hard, but it requires more effort than I feel like using."

"Darn."

"Oh, also…" Aizawa reaches around and grabs a slip of paper off his desk. He presents it to Izuku, who takes it immediately. "A hall pass. Recovery Girl asked me to give it to you after homeroom."

"O-Oh, thank you!" Izuku says, beaming. "I hope you get better soon, Sensei!"

Aizawa nods curtly. "Well, hurry up. You have other classes."

Izuku nods, bows briefly, and turns and flees the classroom.

"Ah, there you are. Did you bring the notebook?"

Izuku nods, already slinging his backpack off his shoulder and digging through it to find said notebook. He pulls it out and hands it to Recovery Girl, who takes it and studies its cover--it's a blue composition notebook with the word "Dissociate" written on it in black permanent marker.

"Thank you, Midoriya," Recovery Girl says, smiling. "This is very helpful. Also, how do you feel? As far as your injuries go?"

"Oh, I feel fine," Izuku answers. "And I've got you to thank for that."

“Just doing my job, boy.” Recovery Girl sets the notebook on the side table, then turns to him again. “So, I’d like you to leave your body with me for now.”

Izuku blinks. “What.”

“We talked about this yesterday,” Recovery Girl elaborates. “Leave your body here with me for a few hours so I can monitor your vitals.”

“Oh, r-right,” Izuku says, “so...I should just…”

“Lay down, dissociate, and continue the school day. Come back just before lunch, alright?”

“Alright…?”

It seems strange, honestly--he’s never been asked to dissociate before, not that it matters. He hops onto the nearest infirmary bed and lays down, shutting his eyes. A second later, there’s a tug at his chest, and he opens his eyes in the air, out of his body. He’d been sore and exhausted when he was in his own body, but now, he feels oddly refreshed and rejuvenated.

It’s nice being a ghost sometimes.

“Thank you, Midoriya,” Recovery Girl says, pulling up her stool and sitting down at the table where she’d put Izuku’s notebook. “Go finish your classes. If I find out you’re goofing off and not in class where you’re supposed to be, I’ll hit you.”

“O-Okay,” Izuku says, nodding, even though she can’t see him. “See you in a few hours.”

Recovery Girl nods, and Izuku heads off through the wall--literally. He doesn’t like phasing through things, he never has, but it’s better than physically opening the door and getting nauseous.

“I wonder what Aizawa wanted Deku for,” Uraraka is saying when Izuku finally catches up to Iida, Kirishima and Uraraka; they’re killing time before their next class, taking the long way to the classroom. “I mean, you don’t think it was something bad, right…?”

“It’s fine, don’t worry,” Izuku says.

They *shriek* and spin around immediately, their eyes falling on blank, empty space.

Whoops.

Even though he's hovering and not actually touching the ground at all, it is *so dang easy* to forget he's a ghost sometimes.

"SORRY!" Izuku says, waving his hands back and forth, not because they can see him, but because it's a habit of his. "Recovery Girl wants to monitor my vitals for a while so I left my body with her…"

"Oh, dear goodness…" Iida pinches the bridge of his nose, his glasses tilting slightly to one side. "Midoriya, is there...is there a *ghost* bell we can get for you?"

"Weren't you originally against the bell?" Uraraka asks, turning to him.

"Yes, however I am also very against heart attacks."

"I'll--I-I'll try not to scare you again," Izuku says. "I'm really sorry…"

"Don't worry 'bout it, dude, it's fine," Kirishima tells him quickly.

"He's right!" Uraraka adds, smiling. "It's not like you can help it, I mean, you *are* a ghost after all!"

She said it so *casually* it's almost comical, and Izuku smiles; it's nice to be accepted so...so *quickly* like this. Nothing's changed between him and his friends, nothing at all; they treat him exactly how they've always treated him, and…

...And he's glad.

"Uhhh…" Kirishima looks around. "...You still there, buddy, or didja skidaddle?"

"Oh, no, I'm still here," Izuku answers. "Sorry, just got lost in thought for a second..."

The school bell sounds, snapping all their attention to the fact that they're going to be late for their next class, and they sprint--three running and one gliding--towards the classroom.

He tries, really, he does, but he ultimately fails: he scares his classmates several more times leading up to lunch.

Chiyo doesn't quite know what to think of Midoriya Izuku.

The boy is self-sacrificing to a fault, and he won't hesitate to throw himself into any kind of danger when it comes to saving others. It's endearing, really; this boy has the truest heart of any hero-to-be she's ever met, but at the same time…

She flips open the boy's notebook. There are dates at the top of each page; the handwriting is messy, and a lot of it is scribbled out and replaced with new information.

Outdated, then, she thinks. *He writes something, and if he finds out it's incorrect, he scribbles it out.*

The first entries are hard to read; Chiyo remembers the boy telling her that he'd started the notebook when he was little, which means he probably wrote this when he was around six or seven. She flips a couple more pages, skimming; most, if not everything, is scribbled out.

And then she comes to more recent pages. The handwriting is steadier, easier to read, a bit more organized. Things are still scribbled out here and there, but it makes more sense than earlier entries. She decides to start here.

SUMMARY:

[I'm surmising this now because all the rest of my previous notes are either outdated or just…impossible to read. So here we go. My weird "doesn't make any sense" Quirk.]

For lack of a better term, my mom and I started calling this "Dissociate." I've done research online loads of times but apparently there's nothing else quite like it, so I guess I'm the first.

Yay.

Chiyo rolls her eyes, but keeps reading.

INFORMATION:

As a default, I can phase through everything. I hover anywhere between three five and nine fifteen ten inches off the ground.

Gonna test and see if I can fly. I cannot fly.

I can interact with the physical world but it makes me nauseous/ill if I do it for too long. Anti-nausea pills help a little but not by much. I think I immunized myself to anti-nausea pills. Oops.

BACKLASH:

Highest temperature: 38.4 39.5 39.9 40.2

Longest amount of days bedridden: 1 3 4 6 9

Concussions: None ½ [reeeeeeally mild concussion]

Bruises: 2 4 9 12 17 19 23 27 Hella

Sprains/fractures: [See "hella"]

OTHER STUFF:

1) My body doesn't heal from injuries/illness unless I'm in it.

2) Time limit: 12 hours. [Side-note: I don't actually know if this is a legit time limit. Whenever I try staying out of my body for 12 hours, I end up feeling really suffocated and weird, so I always go back. I don't know what happens when I stay out for more than 12 hours and I'm not going to fool around with it, either.]

Chiyo frowns at that for a moment. A time limit. The boy has a time limit. She makes a mental note of this before continuing.

3) I don't feel pain as a ghost, but I feel pain when I'm back in my physical body.

4) I have scars everywhere. Most of them are faint but they keep showing up for some reason.

Chiyo's frown deepens. *Scars?*

5) I can leave my body at any time. I can't leave my body if I'm in immense pain. Not sure of all the mechanics exactly but pain "grounds" me in reality too much to Dissociate. I dunno nothing makes sense anymore. ¯_(ツ)_/¯

He actually drew that, Chiyo thinks, shaking her head. *This boy, I swear...*

SCARS:

1) Two five twelve fifteen seventeen twenty twenty seven nevermind I stopped counting, just, "hella" again.

2) The scars only show up on my "spirit" and I don't know what they are. But then again I don't really know anything about my Quirk anyway so whatever, just one more thing I don't know and probably won't ever find out.

Scars on his spirit, huh. Chiyo has never heard of such a thing before. She wonders, briefly, if it has anything to do with Bakugou Katsuki.

For now, though, she puts it out of her mind and keeps reading.

EXTRA NOTES:

1) Injuries I receive while interacting with the physical world show up on my physical body. (Theory--haven't been able to find out which way yet, but I'm 99% sure this is true)

2) My Quirk doesn't make any freaking sense.

That's all there is right now, plus a jumble of other notes Chiyo still has to sort through. For now, though, this information is enough.

She gets to her feet and turns towards the infirmary bed. The boy's physical body is still here, and she has him hooked up with several monitors--specifically ones for his heart rate and oxygen levels.

She checks the monitors.

Her eyes widen.

Izuku returns to the infirmary just before lunch to retrieve his body and notebook (and his backpack, too--he'd left it there earlier, whoops). Recovery Girl is waiting for him by the desk, scribbling something down on a sheet of paper.

He doesn't announce his arrival, just slips back into his body and sits up.

"Mornin'," he says. "I'm back from the dead."

Recovery Girl jumps, but doesn't freak out like his friends had. "Here," she says, handing back his notebook. He takes it from her at once. "You're cleared to leave. Make sure you eat a good lunch, alright?"

Izuku nods, hopping off the infirmary bed and scooping up his backpack off the floor. "Did you find anything weird?" he asks.

Recovery Girl hesitates. "...That time limit you mentioned in the notebook?" she mentions. "Your twelve hour limit?"

Izuku blinks. "Yeah?"

"You might want to take it seriously," Recovery Girl says. "From this moment henceforth, I forbid you to stay out of your body for more than eleven hours."

Izuku frowns. "Okay…? I mean, I was planning on doing that anyway, i-it feels weird when I try staying out any longer than that--"

"Boy, I'm serious."

Izuku has half a mind to say *Hello Serious, I'm Dead,* but he doesn't. Now doesn't seem like the time, and despite his love for making fun of his own *grave* situations, he knows when to stop.

"...Okay," he says, "I won't stay out of my body for more than eleven hours."

"Good," says Recovery Girl. "Now, go on. Like I said, remember to eat a good lunch, alright?"

Izuku nods, bows, then turns and leaves the infirmary.

Aizawa makes the announcement about the Sports Festival the next day during morning homeroom. Izuku's classmates are, of course, excited about it, just like he is. The Sports Festival is a huge deal, especially for aspiring heroes; it's a great way to throw yourself out there and show the world what you're made of.

Along with being excited, Izuku is absolutely terrified. He's tried and failed to write several speeches; they all come out sounding hollow once he's done with them, though, so eventually, he gives up and just decides to make it up as he goes along.

A week passes. He trains with All Mi--Toshinori, that is, on Dagobah, and he knows his classmates are training, too. One week down and one week to go.

The Sports Festival is almost upon them.

And then, on his way to his next class with his friends, only six days before the Sports Festival--

"Midoriya Izuku, please report to the teacher's lounge immediately," Recovery Girl's voice booms over the intercom, and Izuku and those with him jump collectively.

"Dude, what up?" Kirishima asks, frowning. "Something happen…?"

"I have no idea," Izuku says, already turning around to make a break for the teacher's lounge. "I'll catch up with you guys later, gotta blast!"

"Okie dokie!" Uraraka says, waving, and Izuku turns and takes off. Iida's call of "DON'T RUN IN THE HALLS!" echoes through his ears, but he barely slows down. It's extremely rare for a student to be called over the school's intercom. Something's wrong, that's the only explanation.

He runs the whole way there, and as soon as he arrives, he barely

remembers to knock before throwing the door open.

There are two people there--Toshinori and someone else Izuku has never seen before. They both notice his arrival (the door smashing into the wall is hard to miss), but Toshinori is the first person who actually says anything.

“Midoriya, my boy,” he says, rising to his feet, “this is Naomasa, a dear friend of mine and a detective on the police force.”

“Hello, Midoriya-kun,” the man, Naomasa, says, and he reaches out to shake Izuku’s hand. “It’s nice to finally meet you.”

Izuku blinks, then shakes his hand. “It’s nice to meet you, too,” he says numbly.

“He knows about One For All,” Toshinori says, answering Izuku’s unasked question. “Feel free to speak freely.”

Izuku nods, but his confusion isn’t gone. “What’s...what’s going on…?”

“I came to applaud you for your bravery at the USJ,” Naomasa says, smiling. “I would have liked to do it sooner, but you weren’t exactly in the best condition at the time.”

“O-Oh, it’s okay,” Izuku says, “I’m not...I mean, I didn’t do anything special--”

“You bought time and saved the lives of your classmates,” Naomasa argues. “I’d say that’s praise-worthy.”

“I-It’s not, believe me,” Izuku says, shaking his head. “I was scared out of my mind, there wasn’t anything brave about what I did--”

“It’s *because* you were scared out of your mind that what you did was so brave,” Naomasa interrupts, and he smiles. “Thank you, Midoriya-kun.”

Izuku’s head is spinning, and his cheeks feel too hot. “You’re...you’re welcome.”

“Also,” Naomasa goes on, “I’m here to assure you that we will have officers as well as pro heroes stationed throughout the grounds of the Sports Festival. Toshinori here was pretty adamant when he said you’d most likely worry about your friends’ safety the entire time, so I wanted to assure you personally that what happened at the USJ will

not be repeated at the Sports Festival."

Izuku lets loose a sigh. "That's good. Is...is that all, or…?"

"Not quite," Toshinori says. "Recovery Girl wants to speak with you about something as well. She should be back any minute now…"

On cue, the door opens, and Izuku turns around towards the sound. Standing in the doorway is Recovery Girl, and…

And a dog. Recovery Girl has it on a simple leash. The dog is black and white--a border collie, Izuku thinks, he's seen them before. It's wearing a blue harness; words read *"Not a Pet - Service Dog. Ask Before You Pet Me."*

Izuku frowns, confused. "You have a service dog?" he asks.

"Not me," Recovery Girl answers, shaking her head. "You."

Izuku blinks. "I what."

"I spoke with a friend of mine regarding your situation," Recovery Girl says; the dog sits by her, waiting. "She works with service animals, and, well…they were going to drop him out of the service dog program, but I thought I'd give him a chance with you."

Izuku blinks. "A...service dog...for me...?"

Recovery Girl nods. "Lots of people with fainting disorders get service dogs," she says, "and your Quirk isn't unlike that. With recent happenings and new developments of your Quirk that are hazardous to your health, well, it seemed like a good idea. He'll be accompanying you at the Sports Festival and throughout your normal routine here at U.A."

Izuku looks at the dog.

The dog stares back at him curiously.

Izuku tilts his head.

The dog mirrors the movement.

"He's yours," Recovery Girl says softly, and she smiles. "I spoke with your mother regarding this, and she was all for the idea. He's already had quite a bit of training already, although there's more we have to do, but, for now…"

Izuku isn't quite sure how to respond or really what to think. After a moment, he kneels on the ground and stretches out his hand; the dog sniffs him, then licks his fingers.

Something clicks then, in that moment, and Izuku's face splits into a huge smile. The dog's tail swishes back and forth on the ground.

"Also, feel free to name him whatever you'd like," Recovery Girl says. "He *is* your dog, after all."

Izuku runs a hand over the dog's head; his fur is soft and thick.

"...Howler," Izuku says immediately, and he looks up at Recovery Girl, beaming. "I'm naming him Howler."

A beat.

And then there's a chuckle behind him from Toshinori, and Izuku turns his head.

"Of course," his mentor says, smiling and shaking his head. "Of course you'd do that."

Izuku beams. "I'll take that as a compliment!"

Chapter End Notes

Find me on tumblr! :D

ALSO: I have a Discord if y'all wanna scream at me there! I'd love to meet ya! :D

This chapter was greeeeat. Developing Izuku's Quirk a bit more now so that's a thing. Also I'm sORRY I COULDN'T RESPOND TO COMMENTS THIS TIME AROUND I had an appointment for some heart problems up at a hospital so I was gone all day and I just hwekjahskd really tired and not really up to anything rn but tHANK YOU ALL I REALLY APPRECIATE YOUR SUPPORT!!! :D

I'll try and update soon! SPORTS FESTIVAL HYPE, YAS! :D
Thanks for your continued support, you guys! I love you all!! :D

Until next time, go beyond! PLUS ULTRA!!!!!!!!!!

Wait For It

Chapter Summary

"Wait For It" from Hamilton

“Death doesn’t discriminate,
Between the sinners and the saints,
It takes and it takes and it takes,
But we keep living anyway,
We rise and we fall and we break and we make our mistakes,
And if there’s a reason I’m still alive
When everyone who loves me has died,
I’m willing to wait for it.”

Chapter Notes

SCREEEE THERE'S ART

sqooboo

cocothekitten1

THANK YOU GUYS SO MUCH!!!! :D :D :D :D :D ENJOY THE CHAPTER!! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“It’s been a while since I’ve heard from you, Toshinori--”

“My successor is a madman, Gran, you have to help me.”

A chuckle answers this, low and gravelly. *“Sounds like another One For All holder I know.”*

“I’m serious,” Toshinori says; he’s sitting on the couch in the teacher’s lounge, alone, his phone pressed against his ear. “I love this kid, I swear, but he’s got no sense of self-preservation--”

“Again, like someone else I know.”

“--He can summon the past holders of One For All.”

Silence. It’s so quiet now that the sound of a pin dropping would probably hurt his ears.

"...The kid can what?"

"He was born with a Quirk," Toshinori explains. "He calls it 'Dissociate,' and it allows him to leave his body as a ghost. And, of course, One For All merges with the Quirks of its holders, and it merged with Izuku's. When he uses One For All as a ghost...he can summon the past wielders."

Silence again, for a long, long time.

"And I know it isn't your job to teach him," Toshinori goes on. "I know it isn't your responsibility, and that as his mentor, it befalls on me to guide him, but I'm inexperienced, and this boy's Quirk…"

"Yeah, I heard it on the news. Midoriya Izuku, right? That's the kid we're talkin' about? The one who was nearly killed in the USJ incident?"

Toshinori's breath stops for a moment. He thinks of Izuku, pale and still on the infirmary bed, an oxygen mask over his face and a needle in his wrist.

He shakes the image out of his head quickly, although he's sure it'll be back to haunt him later. It always is.

"His Quirk is dangerous," Toshinori says instead, if just to distract himself. "Add One For All to that, and it's even more so. It's powerful, it's far more powerful than I ever thought it'd be, but…"

"But?"

"...Recovery Girl ran some...tests," Toshinori says thickly. "His Quirk has a lot of physical backlash as it is, even without this, but...she found out that the longer he's out of his body...the slower his heart rate is, and the lower his oxygen levels are."

A beat.

"His time limit is twelve hours," Toshinori goes on, a lump in his throat. "Anything longer than that and...his internal organs will gradually shut down until they stop functioning altogether. It will…" Toshinori pauses, takes a breath.

"It will literally *kill him."*

There's a long moment of silence.

"...What the hell kind of Quirk is *this..."*

“That’s why I need your help,” Toshinori says, eager for a subject change. “His power is dangerous *without* the time limit, and I know he can learn more about One For All from you than he ever could from me. If you can help him control it, or learn to use it properly--”

“Yeah, yeah, I hear ya, Toshinori, I hear ya.”

There’s another long pause, followed by an equally long exhale.

“Well, sounds to me like you’ve got yourself one hell of a successor there. I can’t make any promises, but I’ll do what I can to help the kid. The Sports Festival’s tomorrow, right? And Midoriya’s gonna be in it?”

“Yeah.”

“Then I’ll watch him and see how he does, just so I can get a handle on what we’ll need to work on. This whole situation sounds pretty damn serious.”

“Yeah. Thank you, Gran.”

“Tch, don’t thank me. With someone as boar-headed and stubborn as you *for a mentor, God help this kid.”*

Toshinori has no idea how to respond to that, and he doesn’t have to-- the line cuts abruptly, and he pulls the phone away from his ear. Gran Torino hung up on him.

At first Izuku isn’t sure what to think of Howler.

His mother is ecstatic, and of course she is. Apparently, she’d already bought a leash, collar and dog bed ahead of time, without Izuku’s knowledge; it made sense she’d be prepared, considering Recovery Girl had spoken with her ahead of time, but still, it surprises him.

For a little while, though, Izuku has no idea what to think about it. It’s not that he doesn’t appreciate it, he just...doesn’t really know how he should feel.

And then, one day, it just...clicks. Izuku doesn’t know what it is and he doesn’t think he ever will, but something *clicks.*

He’s at the park with Howler at the time, throwing a ball for him, and while he waits for Howler to bring back the ball, he thinks about what happened at the USJ, what happened to *him.* He feels, vaguely, like he’s being pitied by his friends and family. Like he’s being treated like

glass just because of some villain attack.

Except, he reminds himself, picking the ball up off the ground and hurling it for Howler again when he brings it back, *it wasn't just some villain attack. I nearly died.*

"Try not to be upset about it, kiddo, you're alright now."

He sighs. He knows Nana and the rest of the ex-holders can't see or hear his thoughts, but they can feel his emotions, and today's been...kind of rough. He doesn't know why, but things have finally started to click; what actually happened at the USJ, the fact that he'd come so close to losing his friends, the fact that he'd come so close to dying himself--

It's now that he realizes Howler hasn't gone after the ball.

His eyes turn towards the ground. Howler is sitting there, watching him, head tilted to one side. He isn't wearing his vest right now; there isn't a reason, considering Izuku took him to the park so he could let out some energy.

Izuku pauses, staring right back for a long moment.

Then, Howler steps forward and presses his nose into Izuku's hand.

Izuku's breath catches in his throat, and, without really thinking, he kneels in front of Howler. He's sure he'll have grass stains on his jeans, but he doesn't care right now.

Howler watches him.

Izuku watches Howler.

There's a beat.

And then, before Izuku registers moving, his arms are around the dog, and he's hugging him tightly. Howler doesn't squirm or pull away, which Izuku is thankful for; he buries his fingers in the dog's thick fur and hugs him as tight as he dares. His eyes burn with tears, and he closes them to hold back the floodgates, and he doesn't know why but this is really, really nice.

"...The dog was definitely a good idea."

"Kudos to Recovery Girl."

“It’s gonna be okay, kiddo. It’s gonna be okay.”

Izuku exhales shudderingly and nods, hugging Howler tighter.

When he gets home with Howler that evening, Mom is waiting with dinner.

“Welcome back!” Mom says, beaming at him as he pulls off his shoes by the door. Howler stands by him, shaking out his fur. “Did you have fun?”

Izuku nods, smiling. “It was nice to get out of the house for a while,” he says, raising his head to her. “Thanks, Mom.”

She smiles, nods, then turns and heads down the hall into the kitchen. Izuku and Howler follow her.

“So, the, ahh...the voices in your head,” his mother says absentmindedly. “How are they…?”

Izuku is fairly certain that by this point, his mother is so used to the blatant *bizarreness* of his Quirk that she’s stopped being fazed by it. He spoke with her regarding the past One For All users already, and although she was surprised at first, she’s accepted it--just like she’s expected every other aspect of his more-than-a-little-confusing Quirk.

“Ayyy, Mamadoriya!”

“Tell her we’re doing alright, sweetie.”

“Say hi from me, man!”

“They’re doing good,” Izuku says, smiling; he crosses the room, opens the bottom cupboard, and grabs a can of Howler’s dog food out of it while Howler prances around him eagerly. “They say hello and that they’re doing well.”

Mom nods stiffly, like she’s still taking this in. “Izuku, sweetie…”

“I know,” Izuku says with a small, embarrassed smile, as he opens the can and dumps the food into Howler’s bowl. Under his breath, he murmurs, “You can eat, boy,” and then louder, to his mother, “My Quirk doesn’t make any sense.”

Mom smiles, her nervousness obvious on her face. “I wasn’t going to phrase it like that,” she says, “but, yes.”

“It’s alright,” Izuku says, beaming. He straightens up, tossing the empty can into a trash bin while Howler eats. “So, you need any help with dinner?”

“Nope, I’m done, I think,” Mom says, smiling. “I made katsudon again. Tomorrow’s the big day, right?”

The moment the words are out of her mouth, Izuku is overwhelmed by a lot of things--the Sports Festival, the moment he’s been waiting for, the day he can get up in front of the world and proclaim for all the world to see, “*I am here!”* (Or, that was how Toshinori phrased it, at least.) He isn’t ready. He doesn’t have a speech planned out, he hasn’t trained nearly as much as he wanted to, he has no idea what to expect from tomorrow...

But dammit, he’s gonna do his best no matter what.

He smiles. “Tomorrow’s the big day,” he affirms.

On his way home that night, Toshinori texts Izuku. Knowing the kid, he’s probably panicking about the Sports Festival; Toshinori wants to be able to say a couple encouraging words, if he can.

Toshinori
What’s up, kiddo?

Izuku’s response comes almost immediately.

Izuku Midoriya
Not much. Howler keeps stealing my socks.
He thinks he’s helping but he’s not.
Oh great, I think Nana’s laughing at me.
Aaaand they’re all laughing at me.
This is lovely, it’s like having my own little peanut gallery in my head.
Haha they stopped laughing.
That’s right you guys are the peanut gallery.
CRAP THEY’RE LAUGHING EVEN HARDER NOW EJKLJFKLSDf

Toshinori waits a bit to respond. Izuku texts much like he talks; get him started on something and he’ll go on all day.

Izuku Midoriya

Oh hang on I found my socks.
They're in a pile by my shoes.
Howler I love you but can you not.
What were you trying to do.

Toshinori can't help but smile. This kid, honestly...

Toshinori
That reminds me, how are things with you and Howler?

Izuku Midoriya
Oh he's great, everything's great.
My mom and I are teaching him to stay with my body when I dissociate.
He's been doing really good so far.
Recovery Girl mentioned a friend already training him some and it shows.
I think my ghost freaks him out though.
I don't think he can see it but I'm pretty sure he can sense it.
He's getting used to it but still.

Toshinori
Animals sense your presence as a ghost?

Izuku Midoriya
Yeah I think so.
I should probably write that down actually.
Oh wait why did you text again?
Sorry I rabbit-trailed. :/

Toshinori
Just wanted to wish you luck at the Sports Festival tomorrow.

Izuku Midoriya
OH RIGHT.
THANK YOU :D :D :D

Toshinori
Do you have a speech in mind yet?

Izuku Midoriya
jrdkjgdgf
eorsidjfkf
jwieoajskl

jeiorsjdklf
skldfjklf

Toshinori
Oh boy.

Izuku Midoriya
brb gonna go die in a ditch real quick

Toshinori
? ? ? ? ?
Wait.
Kid if you leave your body in a ditch I swear.

Izuku Midoriya
I won't i'm just.
I'm really nervous
I have no idea what to say???

Toshinori
You're gonna do fine, kiddo.
Just get up there and be yourself.

Izuku Midoriya
"myself" is internally screaming right now
I don't think that's what the people want

Toshinori
Don't worry about it. There's no pressure.
Even just saying "Let's do our best" goes a long way.
Plus you have all those puns of yours.

Izuku Midoriya
I guess…

Toshinori
Don't worry about it too much.
I know you'll do great.
Get some sleep, alright? Long day tomorrow.

Izuku Midoriya
Alright.
Night

Toshinori
Night kid.

[IZUKU MIDORIYA IS OFFLINE]

Izuku darkens his screen and flops backwards on his bed, draping an arm over his eyes. Dinner was wonderful--his mother's katsudon is always top notch, and, stressed and worried, it was more comforting now than ever before. Izuku decided to go bed early tonight; Howler is curled up on his little dog bed beside Izuku's own bed, already closing his eyes.

Izuku sets his phone down on the side table and reaches over, turning out the light. He lays there for a moment in the darkness, thinking--then, he grabs his Dissociate notebook off the side table and opens it. The green glow of his eyes light up the pages.

"Huh," he says, setting the notebook back down on the side table. "They *do* glow brighter now."

"It's like Toshi said, kiddo. One For All enhances your own Quirk, so it only makes sense that they'd be brighter now than they were before."

"Right," Izuku says, nodding. "Well...goodnight, everyone."

"Goodnight, dear. Sweet dreams."

"Tomorrow's a long day, get all the sleep ya can, boyo."

"You're gonna do great, kid! I believe in you!"

"Don't fret about tomorrow, 'kay, man? You're gonna do fine."

"See you in the morning. Tell Toshi 'hey' from me when you see him, alright?"

"Goodnight."

"Night night, Midoriya!"

Izuku smiles, then reaches over the side of his bed. His hand runs over Howler's thick, soft fur; the dog licks his hand for a moment.

"Night, Howler," Izuku says. "Big day tomorrow, buddy."

Howler licks his hand again, and then, Izuku yanks his blankets over himself, rolls over on his side, and shuts his eyes.

Today started out rough, but ultimately ended well. He's content.

He doesn't recognize his surroundings.

It's a city, dark and demolished and abandoned. The air is full of smoke and fog, and although his vision is blurry, he can make out buildings with blown-out windows and cracked, crumbling sides. The asphalt of the streets is torn to bits, cracked and definitely not usable. Or repairable.

There's a man standing across from him in the wreckage, grinning, but Izuku can't make out any other features. He's too far away, everything's too blurred, and there's too much smoke and dust.

And then something smashes into him.

It isn't a physical thing. It's a feeling. An immense, intense feeling, unlike anything he's felt before.

It's fear. Fear and regret and desperation. The man is approaching; Izuku watches, first person. A fist that isn't his swings out at the man; golden tendrils surge through the fist, orange and red and golden and twisting, winding, and a train of thought that isn't Izuku's screams *please, please, please, be enough, be enough--*

It isn't enough. There's a crash, there's a bang, and Izuku feels pain. He feels pain, and he feels fear, and when he looks down at himself there's blood, there's so much blood.

I'm sorry, are the words in his head, thoughts that don't belong to him but scream through his ears as though they do, *I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, I'm sorry, I tried, please don't do this, please don't, I don't want this, I don't want to die, I don't want to die, I don't want to die--*

The man is approaching. Pain explodes again and Izuku sees the man's face, a beam, a smile, villainous and twisted and *grotesque,* the most horrible thing Izuku has ever seen.

"Your legacy is gone," the man says. *"You keep trying, all of you, no matter how many times you're cut down. It's going to be like this forever, you understand? It would be better if you gave up now...ended the cycle of pain and loss…wouldn't that be easier than fighting? Wouldn't that be easier than* dying?"

I don't want to die.

I don't want to die.

I don't want to die.

I don't want to die I don't want to die I don't want to die I don't want to die--

IdonʼtwanttodieIdonʼtwanttodieIʼmsorryIʼmsorryIʼmsosorryToshinori--

There's fear and it's drowning him. There's fear and he hears screaming. He feels the scream in his throat but he's not consciously making the sound. He feels it, he feels the fear and it's *too much, it's too much, there's so much fear, he's afraid, he's afraid, he's so afraid and the figure is approaching and the figure is smiling and all Izuku can hear, ringing through his ears like a resounding war canon is*

I'm sorry.

I'm sorry.

I'm sorry.

I'm sorry Toshinori I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry--

No, no, there's so much I want to say, there's so much I want to teach him, please don't do this, please don't, don't take me away from him, don't, please, give me one more chance--

His vision goes red--

I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry please live on, live on, live on, live on, live on Toshinori live on, move on, please move on, please, don't forget me but don't let it haunt you, don't let this haunt you, please, Toshinori, please, kiddo--

--then blurry--

I don't want to die I don't want to die I don't want to die Toshinori I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry I didn't want this to happen I don't want this to happen stop this stop this stop this, let me try one more time.

One more time, please.

Let me try one more time.

One more time.

Please.

One more time.

One more chance.

Please...

--then black. He hears a laugh, a chuckle, a villain, a *murderer, a murderer, he's a murderer--*

...Please…

...Give me…

...one more chance…

...to say…

...goodbye.

For a moment, there's dead silence. It's like the world goes still, black overwhelming him.

And then he's overwhelmed by excruciating pain in his chest, and he feels something snap and cut and sever and *burn--*

Izuku wakes up screaming.

He falls off his bed and hits the floor, the sharp pain jarring him back to reality. In his chest he feels burning, he feels like something's been *cut out of him,* and it's not real he knows it's not real but it feels so real it feels so real it *feels so real--*

He barely makes it to the trashcan by his desk before he throws up. His throat burns and his stomach twists and his chest burns and aches and *why does it hurt why does it hurt it was a dream it shouldn't hurt why does it hurt why does it hurt why does it hurt so much--*

He hears barking. Something nudges him. He jumps, chest heaving, bile in his throat, and Howler's wet nose presses against his cheek. It doesn't ground him to the world, though, he's too out of it, everything feels shaky and blurry and there's acid in his throat and then he's throwing up again and Howler is barking and all Izuku can feel is *fearfearfearfearfearpainpainpainpain and regret and fear and pain, regret, fear, pain, regret, fear, fear, fear, pain, pain, stabbing, cutting, blood, fear, tears, screaming, crying, pain, hurt--*

--Death--

“Kid, KID, you need to calm down, you’re hyperventilating--!”

“Oh crap, crap, crap, crap, crap--!”

“Midoriya--Midoriya, you have to listen, I know it’s hard but you need to breathe, you’ve gotta breathe, buddy--!”

“Kiddo, kiddo, calm down, listen--!”

Fear, pain, fear, pain, regret, my fault, my fault, my fault, this is all my fault--

“Oh crap, those feelings, kid, no, don’t--oh no--”

“DROWN IT OUT! DROWN IT OUT, DO ANYTHING!”

“Hey Midoriya, you wanna hear a joke!? It’s really funny--”

“What songs do you like? We’ll sing something, I don’t know, anything--!”

Fear, fear, pain, regret, pain, fear, he’s scared, he doesn’t want to die, he ***didn’t*** *want to die he didn’t, there were millions of things he wanted to do, millions, what is this, what is this, what’s happening--*

“Oh, oh Mom’s here, oh thank God--”

“It’s okay, kiddo, it’s okay--”

Arms wrap around Izuku’s shoulders and he’s abruptly pulled back into reality where he belongs. He hadn’t dissociated, he’s still grounded in his body by pain and fear, feelings that keep him anchored here against his will, feelings he can’t fight and--

Mom is there, kneeling on the floor with him, hugging him. He feels Howler’s wet nose press against his hand and he lets out a sob and buries his face in his mom’s shoulder, an arm reaching out to wrap around Howler’s neck. He pulls Howler closer and his mom hugs him, strokes his hair, talks to him even though he can’t hear anything over the violent ringing in his ears.

He can’t tell if he passed out or actually slept naturally that night, but it doesn’t matter. He’ll take either one.

Izuku feels disgusting.

He showers, he gets dressed, he splashes ice water on his face to try and wake himself up, but he can't. He has dark circles beneath his eyes when he looks in the mirror, and Howler won't leave him alone, following him around and occasionally nuzzling Izuku's hand for no apparent reason.

Today's possibly the biggest day of Izuku's life thus far, and instead of feeling nervous or excited, all he feels is sick, shaky, and overall *horrible.*

The ex-holders don't know what he saw in his nightmare (flashback, a memory, he thinks--it was too vivid to be anything less). They're worried about him, all seven of them, and they talk to him gently in his head, reassuring, soothing, never jarring (one of them spoke too suddenly once and scared him accidentally, and since then they've been very careful to speak softly).

Mom doesn't want him to go to the Sports Festival (and he can't blame her), but he talks her into it, even though his excuses and promises don't sound reassuring, even to him.

"I have Howler," Izuku says. "I'll be alright, okay? I'm sure once I wake up some more, things will be better…"

Mom nods, but he can tell she's still worried. He hasn't told her about exactly what he saw in his dream, and he knows he never will. He doesn't see a *point.* Details don't really matter right now, anyway. His mother knowing exactly what it was he saw won't change anything.

She kisses his head, tells him she'll be watching on TV and cheering him on, and after she makes him promise he'll be careful and nap when (if) he can, he leaves with Howler and starts towards the Sports Festival.

"Hey, Midoriya! Buddy! You made it *holy crap you look like literal death what happened."*

Izuku knows how he looks--pale and sickly with dark rings beneath his eyes. Howler is still nudging him worriedly; he's wearing his vest now, and Izuku has the dog's leash wrapped around his wrist.

"Thanks," Izuku says flatly. "I kinda feel like literal death. Actually, hang on--"

"No, don't go ghost on me, dude, it's fine," Kirishima says, holding up

his hands. They're standing outside the stadium, surrounded by vendors, civilians, and heroes. "You look *wrecked,* though, what happened?"

"I had a really, *really* rough night," Izuku says, shaking his head to clear lingering feelings of fear and pain and regret. "Don't ask, just...give me some space today, okay?"

"...Okay," Kirishima says. "Gonna be kind of hard to do, y'know, considering it's the Sports Festival and all…"

"Just...try," Izuku says. "I'm sorry, I just...I can't deal with anything. Not right now, at least."

Kirishima gives him an unconvinced look. "Well...okay, I'll give you space. You need anything? Water? Maybe a snack or something?"

"No, I'm fine," Izuku says--it's now that he realizes Kirishima is completely ignoring Howler. Kirishima, as well as the rest of Class 1-A, know Izuku has a service dog, and Izuku has no doubt Iida and Yaoyorozu gave them all the proper run down of how to behave around a service animal. He's glad. One less thing he has to deal with today.

"I'm gonna go drop Howler off with Recovery Girl," Izuku says, while he's thinking about it. "I can't exactly compete with him, now, can I?"

"Right," Kirishima says, nodding. "Well, good luck today, buddy. I'll see you in the waiting room."

"See you," Izuku says, and they part ways.

Nana feels fear.

She feels pain, she feels fear, she feels regret, she feels loneliness, she feels longing. She feels what the boy feels, what *Toshi's* boy feels, and although they aren't actually *her* emotions, Nana feels *broken.*

This boy is hurting and he's hiding it. He's in pain and he's trying to fight through it. He leaves his dog with Recovery Girl and Nana can feel his loneliness, she can feel his longing, she can feel his unspoken, desperate plea of *don't leave me alone, I don't want to be alone, stay with me,* but of course he doesn't say this outloud. Instead he thanks Recovery Girl and bows and when he leaves his steps are heavy and his heart is full of pain.

He saw something.

Last night, in his dream, he saw something. He saw something horrible. Something full of fear and pain and horror, something Nana feels like she *should know* but doesn't.

But even though she's not positive, she has a suspicion. She has a suspicion and she only hopes and prays that she isn't actually right.

Once Howler is gone, Izuku feels incredibly alone.

The past holders are mysteriously quiet in his head, and a part of him is glad but another part of him misses them. He doesn't dwell on it for very long, though. He can't. He doesn't have time.

He finds Class 1-A's waiting room in the stadium. The others are already there; Iida, Uraraka, and Kirishima are talking, as are the rest of the students. Kirishima hears his bell and looks up, and Uraraka and Iida follow his gaze towards Izuku. They smile at him, but say nothing. They don't approach, they don't ask questions; they smile and then they're right back to talking with each other.

Izuku wants space, and he appreciates his friends giving it to him, but at the same time, a part of him wants them to talk to him. He wants to talk, he wants to forget what he'd seen last night, he wants to forget these feelings of pain and fear and sadness and regret and he wants to bury them far away where they'll never touch him again--

"Midoriya."

Todoroki.

Todoroki is approaching him, staring at him with an expression as cold and plain as always, and all Izuku can think is, *no, not today, please not today, I can't do it today, not now, not now, not now, stay away, I can't, I can't, I can't--*

"You're the strongest in the class," Todoroki says, and Izuku listens but doesn't want to. He wants to run but he forces himself to stay grounded where he is, in his body, in this room. The rest of the students are watching, curious, and Todoroki goes on. "You came first in the entrance exam and took on the villains leading the charge at the USJ."

Izuku swallows the bile in his throat, and suddenly within him, the

sorrow and pain and sadness turn into *anger,* and he doesn't mean for it to but it does, it happens and suddenly he's mad, and his fists are shaking, and his vision blurs with tears and he *doesn't want this, he doesn't want this, he doesn't want this--*

"In which case," Todoroki says flatly, "I'm going to beat you. I have something to prove today, and I'm not afraid to leave you in the dust behind me."

Izuku is shaking. He doesn't know what he's feeling anymore but something has *snapped,* something is *wrong,* he feels so wrong and disgusting and he hates the fact that all he can feel in this moment is *anger--*

"D-Dude." Kirishima steps forward, puts a hand on Todoroki's shoulder. "Now isn't the time, seriously--"

"We're starting the festival soon," Todoroki says, shrugging off Kirishima's hand. "Consider this my declaration of war, Midoriya. Today, no matter how hard you try...I promise, I'm going to beat you."

Izuku doesn't want to say anything. He doesn't mean to say anything, but words flow out of his mouth, dark and spiteful and sharp and not what he wants, it's not what he wants, it's not what he wants but he's hurt and he's scared and he's *so very angry--*

"Are you kidding me?" Izuku snaps, and Todoroki--as well as Kirishima and the others--actually step backwards. He sounds threatening, he knows he does, he knows he's scaring them but he can't stop, he can't stop, he wants to stop but he can't. "Are you *kidding* me? This is the first time I actually have a real conversation with you and the only thing you want to do is *fight me?"*

"It's alright, Midoriya," Kirishima soothes, or, he tries to. He ultimately fails.

"You wanna declare war, Thermostat?" Izuku snaps. "You think that I'm gonna back down just because you got in on recommendations? You think I'm gonna just stand down and let you beat me, is that what this is? You think I'm *scared of you?"*

He barks a laugh and it doesn't feel like him, but he can't help it. Talking and laughing have always been his coping method, always, and right now, he's more alone than he's ever been, more hurt than he's ever felt.

“You wanna do this?” Izuku growls. “You wanna fight me, huh? Well, go for it. I’ll take you on, don’t think I won’t. You think I’m intimidated by this *cold shoulder* thing you’re giving me? Well, I’m *not.* You don’t *scare me.”*

He steps forward until his face is inches from Todoroki’s. Todoroki doesn’t move. The others do, though, backing off immediately and watching the scene from a slightly greater distance.

“You wanna fight, Thermostat?” Izuku questions, eyes narrowed, teeth barred. “Then let’s *fight.”*

Izuku feels like the worst human being alive.

He sits on the floor in a stall in the nearest bathroom, back pressed against the wall, knees pulled against his chest and arms wrapped around them. He rests his forehead on his knees, chest tight, head and heart heavy.

The anger is gone, and he feels utterly empty.

“…Kiddo.”

Nana.

“I didn’t mean to say that,” Izuku says shakily, squeezing his legs tighter. “I didn’t mean to say that, I didn’t mean to…to get so angry like that…”

“It’s not your fault. You’ve had a rough day, right?”

She says it lightheartedly enough, but he knows it’s fake. He wants to scream.

“I can’t do it,” he says, voice a broken whisper. “I can’t do it today, I can’t.”

“Yes, you can.”

“I c-can’t, I really, really can’t. I can’t go give the speech, I can’t give it my all, I can’t, I can’t, I-I *don’t know what to do--”*

“Kiddo.”

Izuku doesn’t answer.

“Kiddo, listen to me.”

He doesn’t want to, but it’s not like he has a choice.

“Take a deep breath.”

Izuku is barely listening at this point but he obeys, sucking in a breath through gritted teeth. He holds it for a moment, then lets it out in a long, heaving sigh.

“Raise your head.”

Izuku does. He doesn’t know what else to do.

“So, what do you see?”

“...I’m...still in the bathroom.”

“Yep. And you ain’t giving your speech in the bathroom.”

Izuku shakes his head feverishly, several lumps in his throat. “I c-can’t do it,” he says, then sucks in a breath between his teeth before continuing. “I can’t do it, I can’t get up there and give my speech, Nana, I can’t, I can’t do anything, *I can’t do it, I can’t, I can’t, I can’t--”*

“Kiddo. Breathe.”

Izuku does. It’s hard.

“Listen to me. You’re hurting right now. You’re hurting and no one understands what it’s like. But...it isn’t going to be like this forever. You’ve got your whole life ahead of you, Izuku.”

“B-But...N-Nana, I...I-I can’t--”

“Your future isn’t here, kiddo,” Nana says, softly but with authority. *“It’s out there, waiting for you. But you have to seize it. You have to hold onto it with both hands and never let go.”*

“I...I-I don’t think...I-I *c-can’t,* I just--”

“Breathe,” Nana tells him. *“Breathe. Step back. Cry, if you need to. It’s not like we’re gonna judge you. But never, ever tell yourself that you* can’t. *You’re going to go out there, kiddo, and you’re gonna knock ‘em dead. You’re gonna go out there, and you’re gonna shine like the shooting star you are. You’re gonna go out there, and it’s going to hurt, but it’s going to get better. You’re strong. You can push through this. We believe in you,*

and when you blow the crowds away, we're gonna be there, cheering you on."

Izuku sucks in a breath. The pain is still there, the pain and fear and regret that isn't quite his own, but it's lesser than before. He's still scared and shaky and he doesn't know how well he'll actually *perform* in today's festival but...

"...I'll...I'll try."

He can feel Nana's smile. *"Go for it. You've got this, kiddo."*

Izuku has a tiny stack of notecards he'd scribbled up last night. He never planned a speech, of course, but there were a few things he thought he could mention that might come in handy.

He feels numb when he returns to the waiting room with his classmates. The moment he walks through the door, an announcement summons them out into the stadium. The Sports Festival is officially underway.

Kirishima purposefully knocks their shoulders together as they walk down the corridor, and when Izuku turns to look at him, Kirishima smiles and gives him a thumbs-up. A second later, Izuku smiles back shakily.

The sunlight is blinding when they clear the corridor. Crowds roar through Izuku's ears like waves crashing in a stormy ocean, and Izuku has half a mind to clamp his hands over his ears and leave them there.

He doesn't. Instead, he follows his classmates and joins up with the rest of the U.A. students from different courses; General Studies, Class 1-B, the Support Course, all of them. People with aspirations and dreams, just like Izuku.

The pro hero Midnight steps onto the stage and holds up a hand. The crowds finally stop clapping and cheering, and Midnight beams at the group of students before her, baton in one hand and mic stand in the other.

"Welcome, everyone, to the first year round of the Sports Festival!" Midnight says, and the crowds clap and cheer again for a moment before falling silent to let her continue. "As most of you already know, the student who places first in the Entrance Exam gives the opening speech for this event, aaaaand...representing the first years this

year...is Midoriya Izuku!"

The crowds explode, and for a second, Izuku stands, stiff as a board, his little stack of notecards clutched between his clammy fingers. He's so stiff and on-edge that he doesn't get the hint that that's his cue to move until Iida gives him a small, prompting shove towards the stage.

He walks on legs that don't feel like his own. Midnight steps to the side, away from the mic and the stand, and Izuku's never felt so nervous and scared before in his life. He feels thousands of eyes on him, the eyes of his classmates included in that, and his hands are shaking, and his thoughts are jumbled worse than a thousand piece jigsaw puzzle.

He trips.

He catches himself before he falls completely, but the notecards go everywhere, scattering all over the stage and getting blown into the crowd by gusts of wind. He only hopes his handwriting is bad enough for no one else to be able to read them.

For a while, he stands there, and he knows everyone is staring at him, he can feel their eyes bearing into him, and he wants to scream and laugh and cry all at the same time.

But he doesn't.

What he *actually* does is smile embarrassedly, rub the back of his neck, and say into the mic in front of thousands of people,

"Wellp, guess I didn't play my cards right."

There's a beat.

And then, there's a collective groan and sigh, and Izuku thinks he catches a couple cackles. Kirishima is on the freaking *ground,* literally rolling around laughing his head off, and everyone's staring at him, some ashamed (like Iida) and some amused (like the rest of his friends).

Izuku suddenly feels less embarrassed, though.

He steps up to the mic. The crowds quiet and still, waiting for him to continue, and he sucks in a long, deep breath, then begins.

"S-So--"

A shriek of feedback cuts him off, and he jerks his head away from the mic. He hears sharp cries of shock and alarm, and he cringes immediately, wishing he could back off and go home and bury his face in his pillow and scream--

"Kiddo. Breathe. You're doing great, we're all cheering for you."

Izuku's breath catches in his throat, and his head snaps up. The crowds are watching him, staring at him, waiting for him.

And he remembers he isn't alone.

Nana. The previous holders of One For All. Iida, Uraraka, Tsuyu, Kirishima, his mom at home, Toshinori, everyone--

They're with him.

In spirit.

Pfft.

"...You know," Izuku says into the mic, suddenly more confident than before, "...I'm just like you all. Everyone here, in this moment, in this day...we're all fighting for something."

Tenya watches, wide-eyed. He'd been worried before, when he watched Midoriya drop his notecards all over the place, but now... *now...*

...He seems like a totally different person…

"...Whether we're fighting for a dream," Izuku goes on, and he thinks about himself, young, dreaming of heroes, dreaming of hope and peace and justice and *saving people.* "...Whether we're fighting for the people we love…"

Names come to mind at once. Uraraka, Tsuyu, Iida, Kirishima, Toshinori, Mom, his friends, the people he cares about…

"...Or, even if we're fighting for ourselves," Izuku goes on, and as his eyes scan the crowd, he sees Todoroki. He doesn't know what Todoroki fights for, what drives him, but…

"...We're all fighting for something," Izuku continues. "We're all here, in this moment, because we're *fighting for something.* We're fighting for

something that *matters* to us."

He doesn't know where this burst of confidence came from, but he takes it and runs with it. Gladly.

"So, today," Izuku says, raising his head towards the crowds. "Today, tomorrow, and for the rest of our lives...everyone, fighting for what *means something* to them…"

He throws his fist into the air, fist-bumping the sky.

"Let's all do our best!" he shrieks, his voice an octave higher than he'd meant for it to be. "Everyone, together! Fighting for what we care about, fighting for what matters to us! Go beyond…!"

"PLUS ULTRA!!"

The shout resounds and echoes throughout the stadium; Kirishima leaps into the air and pumps both fists over his head; everyone claps and cheers and whoops, jumping and shouting, and in the stands the audience is on their feet, clapping, cheering, whooping and yaying.

Izuku beams, and he laughs giddily, relief flooding over him. He power-walks off the stage and lets Midnight take over, and Kirishima ruffles his hair while Uraraka cheers, telling him what a great job he did and that it was the best speech she'd ever heard.

And in his head cheer seven unheard, unseen beings, screaming that *"THAT'S MY BOY!"* and *"WE'RE SO PROUD OF YOU, IZUKU!"* and then, Nana's voice, quiet, but somehow more distinct than all the others:

"See? What'd I tell ya, kiddo."

And Izuku laughs again, giddy with relief and overwhelmed with something that, for once today, *isn't* pain or fear or sadness.

He's fairly certain it's joy.

Chapter End Notes

Find me on tumblr! :D

Wellp guess who wasn't able to respond to comments again like the horrible person she is.

That's right. 'Tis me. But a lot went down in this chapter and I

hope you enjoyed it!! Let me know what you think and I'm gonna try and respond to all your guys' comments this time around, because I love you and that's what you deserve. <3

Anyway, thank you all so much for your support! Until next time, go beyond! PLUS ULTRA!!!!!!!!!!

Come Alive

Chapter Summary

"Come Alive" from The Greatest Showman

“Come alive, come alive,
Go and light your light, let it burn so bright.
Reaching up to the sky,
And it’s open wide, you’re electrified.”

Chapter Notes

HEY THERE'S ART!!! :D

sketchasylumrue

And another from sketchasylumrue! :D

THANK YOU SO MUCH RUE!!!!! <3 :D I HOPE Y'ALL ENJOY THE CHAPTER!! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku isn’t quite sure what to think about Todoroki Shouto.

When he has time to think about it, as he and the other students gather for the first event of the Sports Festival (an obstacle race--there are always two preliminary rounds, different each year, to eliminate the majority of the students so they have less people to work with for the one-on-one matches), he feels horribly guilty. He hadn’t had the best first-impression of Todoroki, and now, thanks to his explosion, Todoroki hadn’t had a good first impression of him, either.

“Gah, it ain’t your fault, boyo. The kid should’ve read the situation better, you aren’t to blame for snappin’ at him like that.”

“I know,” Izuku says under his breath so the students around him can’t hear, “I just...I feel…”

He feels horrible, that’s what. It’s the *Sports Festival,* of *course* they’re going to be declaring war on each other left and right. There was no reason for him to be *aggressive* toward Todoroki like that, no reason at all--

“Kiddo. Cut it out.”

“Yeah, dude, it isn’t your fault. You had a rough night, and today hasn’t really been the best so far. It’s fine that you’re upset, we get it.”

“I know,” Izuku says again, “but...still…”

He thinks about it, considers that look in Todoroki’s eyes. He doesn’t know anything about Todoroki other than he got in on recommendations and that his father is Endeavor, the number two hero, but...

I have something to prove today, Todoroki had said, and Izuku wonders what that could be. Todoroki seems...cold. Stoic. He doesn’t look angry nor happy, neither thrilled nor displeased, just...flat. And Izuku finds himself wondering why, because Todoroki hadn’t been born like that.

Something must’ve happened.

“Hey. Deku.”

Izuku flinches instinctively, then turns. Bakugou is staring at him, standing just a little ways off.

“Ooooh. It’s him.”

“Yo, kiddo, punch him in the face.”

“No, don’t do that, he could get in trouble--”

“Okay, fine. Make it look like an accident.”

“Oh dear--”

“What the hell was that speech, anyway?” Bakugou snaps, and Izuku’s head jerks up, his mind brought back to the present. “You could barely stand on your own two feet up there. It was pathetic.”

Izuku takes in a long, deep breath through his nose. The world is just out to get him today, isn’t it? He’s mostly forgiven Todoroki; after all, Todoroki wasn’t intentionally trying to be aggressive. It was a declaration of war, sure, but it wasn’t meant to be a violent one.

Bakugou is violent, though. He’s intentionally trying to be aggressive here.

Izuku turns to him. His day thus far has been so stress-filled and overall *awful* that it's kind of turned around into an odd sense of tranquility, like it's come in full circle. He's had enough, he's passed his limit, and he *cannot deal with this anymore.*

He's *done.*

"I'm sorry, Bakugou," Izuku says, putting a hand on his hip and cocking his head one way. "Which of us came first in the entrance exam, again?"

"Ooooooooooh--"

"Take that, *Bakubrat."*

"Guys, we should probably be quiet, remember?"

"Oh, right, right--"

Bakugou snarls at him. "You can think whatever you wanna think," he growls. "You placing in that entrance exam like you did was a total fluke, anyway. There's no way you actually did it."

"Or," Izuku says, "maybe there's just no way you can look past your ego long enough to accept that I did."

"OOOOOOOOOOOOOOH--"

"Shhhh!"

"Whatever," Bakugou snaps. "At least *my* Quirk doesn't scare people."

The ex-holders riot immediately, everyone shouting and yelling profanities and threats at once, but it's all too jumbled for Izuku to make out. Instead of trying to make sense of it, he sucks in a sharp breath and looks Bakugou in the eyes.

"...You're right. You can do that without a Quirk."

The voices in his head have nothing to say to that, and Izuku turns and keeps walking. He doesn't look back at Bakugou once, and a part of him is afraid of what would happen if he does.

"...Kid? Are you okay?"

"...Yeah," Izuku says, swallowing thickly. "I'm okay."

He's lying.

Everything sucks.

Izuku stumbles more than runs as he charges alongside the other students across the obstacle course. His thoughts are jumbled and his limbs feel heavy; his speech had gone better than expected, but he still feels insanely shaky, not to mention Bakugou approaching him like that--

"You've got this, kiddo! Remember, shine like the shooting star you are! Show everyone what you can do!"

"You go, kid!"

"Go, go, go!"

"We need a cheerleading squad!"

"No, we really, really don't--"

"GIVE ME AN 'M'!"

"Please don't--"

The monologue continues, but somehow it helps. Izuku's own desperate, panicked thoughts are drowned out by the encouraging voices of the past holders, and he gladly takes the distraction.

He runs faster than before.

"Why'd you grab that hunk of metal again?"

"Couldn't you just YEET out of your body and get to the finish line that way?"

"I *could,"* Izuku gasps, struggling along and hauling a sheet of metal from one of the robots with him, "but I'd get trampled pretty quick if I did that, y'know? It'd be pretty stupid in an event like this…"

"Sorry to burst your bubble, boyo, but you ain't beyond doin' stupid things."

"…Fair."

The ex-holders fall silent once again, only shouting an encouraging word here and there, and Izuku struggles onwards. Todoroki and Bakugou are up ahead, *far* up ahead, and while Izuku still feels guilty over how he treated Todoroki, well, he isn't going to back down.

He runs faster. There are people counting on him, cheering him on, people like Mom and Toshinori and the past holders of One For All.

He's going to do it. He's going to do his best.

The land mines are *greeeeeeat.*

Izuku has a plan, though. It isn't a good plan and it isn't fool-proof in the slightest; in fact, it's probably one of the dumbest things he's ever done (second to going up against Shigaraki at the USJ, of course).

With the sheet of metal, he begins to--carefully--dig up the landmines.

"Whatcha doin', boyo?"

"Oh, oh those are landmines, oh dear, oh dear--"

"HELL YEAH BLOW 'EM UP, KID!"

"Are you sure we should be encouraging this--?"

Izuku takes a couple steps backwards, holding the sheet of metal in front of him, and then he takes a running start towards the pile of landmines he'd gathered, and his feet leave the ground as he leaps--

"WAIT, WAIT, WAIT, WHAT ARE YOU DOING, I SAID BLOW THEM *UP, NOT--!"*

The sheet of metal slams into the landmines, setting them all off at once, and Izuku blasts into the sky.

It works...better than expected. There's wind in his face and hair as he shoots over the mines, over his classmates, over other students, over the entire field, over the two students in the lead.

He's in first place.

He looks back over his shoulder as the momentum carries him away. He sees Todoroki's stunned face and Bakugou's furious expression, and he wants to laugh.

He doesn't, though.

Instead, he grins, salutes, and shouts, *"SEE YA AT THE FINISH LINE, BLOWHARD! THERMOSTAT!"*

It's stupid. It's petty. And he'll probably feel bad about it in like an hour.

But he's had a really, *really* long day, and he can't bring himself to care right now.

Somehow, he manages to come in first place in the obstacle course.

The crowds roar and clap and cheer for him, and of course they do--Izuku's in the spotlight again, but for once he doesn't try to shy out of it. He's earned this.

He smiles.

There's no breathing room; as soon as the rest of the competitors have returned from the course, Midnight steps up again and spins the randomizer wheel to decide their next match.

He isn't quite sure his dissociation will help him all that much, considering the one-on-one fights and whatnot; technically, if his opponent yanks his physical body out of bounds, ghost or no, he's still out of bounds.

So. That's something to think about.

But of course, he'll deal with that when the time comes--for now, he has to think about the second event. A cavalry battle. A cavalry battle, okay, he can probably do something with this. He has to be able to do something with this--

And then he's screwed over by the whole "ten million points" thing. Which only makes sense, because of course victory doesn't come without some kind of sacrifice. He wonders, briefly, how hard it would be to just have a normal day for once.

He gets together a team for the cavalry battle, somehow--it's made up of Uraraka (and thank goodness for her), Tokoyami, and an over-eager, flamboyant girl named Hatsume Mei from the Support Course.

The rules of the cavalry battle are simple: keep your own headband around your head, put the ones you steal around your neck, and don't

let the “rider” of the cavalry team (in this case, the rider is Izuku) touch the ground.

They have their team. Izuku straps the 10,000,000 point headband around his forehead, securing it with velcro. Afterwards, he runs his thumb over the smooth metal of his bell; he doesn’t remember when he started doing this as a way of calming himself, but it works.

“TIME’S UP!” Midnight says, thrusting her baton into the air above her head. “Hope you kiddies have your teams ready, because the fight won’t wait for you!”

The buzzer sounds, and the cavalry battle begins.

And of course everyone immediately goes for Izuku and the 10,000,000 points. Because of course, why *wouldn’t* they go for him and the 10,000,000 points?

Just once, Izuku thinks, as Uraraka blasts them into the air with Hatsume’s rocket boots and Izuku flicks on his borrowed jetpack to propel them upwards. *Just once, can I have a victory without immediately getting stabbed in the back?*

Team Todoroki stole the 10,000,000 points.

It was Iida’s special move that got them it; one moment, Izuku and his teammates were staring their team down, and the next moment the team was gone, and so were the 10,000,000 points.

And now Todoroki and his team are on the other side of the arena, and Izuku and his own team are left with no points at all.

We’re running out of time, Izuku thinks frantically; behind him and around him, the other teams are duking it out, fighting for the headbands. After all, even if they can’t come in first, they only need to make the top four in order to move on. *We’re running out of time and--*

And right now we have zero points.

He grits his teeth. They don’t have time. They don’t have time. They *don’t--*

“Take a breather, you’ve got this. Think it through.”

Izuku sucks in a sharp breath; he hadn’t realized he’d been holding it. He raises his head and sets his eyes on Todoroki and his team,

specifically on the headbands, flipped backwards to hide their numbers, around his neck.

One shot, Izuku thinks, gritting his teeth. *We have one more shot and then it's over.*

One more shot, one more chance.

And…

"Uraraka, Tokoyami, you guys," Izuku says, narrowing his eyes "get in close. Don't let my body touch the ground."

"Don't let your what?" Hatsume asks, but there's no time to answer. The clock is ticking and they're running out of time.

They charge. Izuku grits his teeth tighter; Todoroki puts out his right arm, ready to attack. One chance. One moment. One shot.

And Izuku isn't going to throw it away.

Izuku fires up One For All. He doesn't throw the punch, doesn't do any of that; it's a distraction, something to keep Todoroki focused on that and not what he's about to do--

"Wait, kid, you ain't gonna--"

"HOLD IT--!"

Izuku thrusts out his arm. Todoroki throws out his left hand, the side Izuku attacked on, and for a moment, Izuku feels heat in his face; it isn't intense, but it's there. Flames, fire, he realizes. Todoroki's left side.

Control, Izuku thinks desperately. *Control it, control it, control it, my power can kill, my power can kill, control it--*

Izuku summons his will, waits for the right moment, and swings his arm again--but this time, he swings it back towards himself.

The wind pressure is enough to blow back Todoroki's own attack, and although Izuku's arm burns and pulses with pain, it isn't broken.

Great, he thinks, if just for a moment, *so I can only control it if I'm actively trying not to kill someone. Perfect.*

Todoroki is distracted. His entire team is. Izuku looks down at

Uraraka, nods, and as soon as she nods back, he dissociates.

It's a very quick, true moment; he drops out of his body and surges forward, concentrating all his energy on his hands. He phases right through Todoroki--another distraction, since he knows how odd it is to he phased through by a ghost--and reaches out for the headbands.

Which one? he thinks, mind moving frantically while the world around him slows to a near standstill. *Which one is it? Which one? Which one?*

"GRAB THEM ALL!"

"Crap, I wasn't looking!"

"HE COULD'VE SWITCHED THEM UP, WHO KNOWS WHICH ONE IS THE RIGHT ONE--"

Izuku grabs two headbands--the one on the top and the one on the bottom. He yanks them, the velcro tearing and the headbands secure in his hand, and Todoroki lurches forward suddenly, eyes wide. Izuku feels a little bad for phasing through him like that, but the feeling is gone when he remembers Todoroki literally declared war on him not even half an hour ago.

He zooms back into his body. The headbands fall into his lap as his head snaps up, and he grabs them with his real, physical hands and settles them around his neck.

He doesn't know which ones he grabbed until Midnight's voice booms around them seconds later.

"TIME'S UP!" she shouts, and all the students and their cavalry teams stop dead in their tracks. "In first place comes Midoriya, Hatsume, Uraraka, and Tokoyami! Excellent job, kiddos!"

"WHOO!"

"You did it, man! Everyone, gimme an 'M'!"

"'M!'"

"Oh, not this again--"

Izuku lets out a huge rush of breath in relief. Well, if *that* hadn't been lucky he doesn't know what is. Midnight goes on, announcing the rest of the winners (Todoroki and Bakugou are amongst them), but Izuku puts it out of his mind for now, so giddy with relief he could cry.

“Deku!” Uraraka shrieks, dropping formation; Izuku *almost* hits the ground, but is caught by Tokoyami in time.
“DekuDekuDekuDekuDeku, we did it, we did it, we really did it!”

“Hey, Ten Million, that was awesome!” Hatsume says, grinning, getting right up in his face. “What was that, huh? How’d you do that? I wanna know!”

Izuku laughs shakily, rubbing the back of his neck. He does this a lot, he thinks. “W-Well, it’s a long story--” he starts; and then, out of the corner of his eye, he sees Todoroki already leaving the field, heading down one of the winding corridors of the arena.

Izuku watches him go; in his mind, he hears his own words, *“You wanna fight, Thermostat? Then let’s* fight,” and he feels guilty all over again.

I should probably apologize, he thinks, biting his lip.

“Ten Miiilllionnn~!” Hatsume’s hand waves in his face, and Izuku snaps his attention back to her. He hasn’t even had the chance to take a single step. “Tell me how you did that!”

“E-Erm, like I said, it’s a long story,” Izuku says. “There’s a better time for it, I’m sure, but right now isn’t--”

“There will be a bit of an intermission now while we set the stage for the one-on-one matches!” Midnight’s voice booms again, and Izuku and the others turn towards her. “Enjoy your break while you can, kiddies! After this, it’s gonna be non-stop!”

“Deku, maybe you should try and get some rest somewhere,” Uraraka says, and Izuku turns to her. She frowns at him; now that her giddiness and joy at their victory has faded somewhat, she seems worried. “You look really tired.”

“Really tired” feels like an understatement, but Izuku doesn’t say so. Rather, he nods. “You’re right,” he says. “I’ll find somewhere to take a power-nap. I do feel kind of dead on my feet right now.”

Tokoyami blinks. “Is that a ghost joke--”

“Later!” Izuku says, waving, and he turns and runs off, his bell jingling cheerfully as his feet slam the ground.

The first thing Izuku does is get Howler from Recovery Girl. Howler is ecstatic, perking up the moment Izuku enters the infirmary, and Izuku leaves with him, the dog's leash wrapped around his wrist. He's happy to have Howler back at his side again. He missed him.

He bumps into Toshinori on his way back to the waiting room.

"There you are!" Toshinori says, raising a hand in greeting. "You did good, Midoriya, I'm--" He stops suddenly, like he's slammed into an invisible wall, and his eyes go wide. "...Kiddo."

"Hmm?"

"What *happened* to you?"

Izuku smiles. He has no idea how it looks on his face, but Toshinori winces, so it can't be good. "I wasn't able to sleep last night," he says. "I'm gonna go crash on the floor somewhere, don't mind me."

It's hard to read the look on Toshinori's face, but he looks mostly worried. "That isn't good," he says. "Are you sure you're okay? The one-on-one matches are up next, it isn't safe to fight when you're exhausted--"

"That's why I'm gonna go sleep until the matches," Izuku answers simply. "I'll be fine, alright? Maybe I can steal some of Aizawa-sensei's coffee."

Horror overcomes Toshinori's face. "Do you want to *die?"*

"Yes. But don't worry, I'll let you take the fall for it."

"Kid, *no--"*

"Okay, fine, I won't steal his coffee," Izuku says. "It was a joke, anyway. Not gonna lie, if Aizawa-sensei killed you over coffee...that would make me very…"

"...Don't."

"...Depresso."

Toshinori puts his head in his hands. "That's it, kid. You're officially grounded."

Izuku blinks. "...Is...Is that a coffee bean joke?"

“Maybe.”

“I have corrupted the number one hero. My life is complete.”

“In all seriousness, though,” Toshinori says, “go get some sleep. A fifteen minute rest goes a long way.”

Izuku nods. “Alright. Thanks!”

He leaves with Howler and a smile on his face.

Izuku wakes up to a tug in his chest.

He sits up off the floor, feeling less rested than before. Howler is still sitting there, waiting for him, which Izuku thinks is good; the dog stayed with his body (even though he was still in it) the entire time he was asleep. He’s learning, then.

“Ayy, welcome back to the land of the living, buddy.”

“I don’t feel like I’m back in the land of the living,” Izuku says, shaking his head. “How long was I asleep?”

“Ehh, maybe ten, fifteen minutes?”

“I counted twelve.”

“Wow, how bored can you get?”

“Shut up, Gerald.”

“YOU KNOW WHAT--!”

Something tugs at Izuku’s chest again, reminding him of what had awoken him in the first place, and he frowns, looking around for a moment.

“Yo, boyo, what up?”

“Something’s wrong,” Izuku says, confused. “There’ve been a few times where I’ve gotten this weird feeling in my chest, and usually it’s right before something bad happens.”

“Oh, you mean like premonition?” Nana guesses. *“I’m pretty sure that’s a thing a lot of people suspect ghosts to have. It wouldn’t surprise me if you had a few more ghostly traits than you realized.”*

Izuku nods, then blinks in confusion when there's another blatant tug within him. Something is definitely wrong. He doesn't feel dread like he did when they were attacked by the League at the USJ, but he definitely feels *something.*

And it isn't good.

He's about to get to his feet, but his physical body is still exhausted, and he'd really rather save it for the matches if he can. He looks at Howler; the dog looks back at him, obedient and patiently waiting.

Izuku trusts him and dissociates, leaving his body behind as he heads off to investigate.

He moves down corridors and hallways, unseen, searching, listening. He still feels off, even as a ghost, and something is definitely wrong, he just doesn't know what it is yet. He doesn't think U.A. is under attack again; the tug would be much stronger if that were the case.

But something is--

Yank.

There's a jerk and a pull and a tug at his chest unlike before, and it actually has Izuku lurching forward. It isn't dread, it isn't fear, it isn't a death omen; it's something entirely new, an unfamiliar feeling, like something within him is being suffocated.

"Holy crap--"

"I *can feel that, what the hell--"*

"Kiddo--"

Something is definitely, definitely wrong, and it's worse than Izuku originally thought it was.

He flies, moving as quickly as he can. He feels led by the tug in his chest, like it's pulling him in the right direction; he knows where he has to go even though he doesn't know where he's going.

"--the hell is wrong with you, I expected better of you, Shouto."

Izuku turns the corner.

Endeavor and Todoroki are standing there across from each other in the corridor. The flames on Endeavor's face send what would be, on

any other occasion, a warm glow through the shadowy hall--but of course, right now, the glow is nothing short of terrifying.

For the first time since Izuku's met him, Todoroki looks angry. No, he's *furious,* fists balled and shaking at his sides, and Endeavor has nearly the same stance, though he's better at hiding his anger.

"I have nothing to say to you," Todoroki spits. "I didn't need my fire in the matches--"

"But you wouldn't have lost if you'd used it."

"I'm not using your damn Quirk."

There's another lurch in Izuku's chest that sends him forward. This is different. This is *weird.* This is *bad.* Todoroki's actual life isn't in danger but something else is, something else is in danger that isn't Todoroki's physical being.

It's his *spirit.*

Endeavor narrows his eyes. His fists hadn't been shaking before but they're shaking now, and Izuku doesn't know what to do. The feeling in his chest is suffocating now; he feels like he's being choked.

"Okay, boyo, here's what you do--sucker-punch Endeavor through a building."

"As much as I hate to agree with such violence, I concur, sweetheart."

"Endeavor, you get away *from that kid, you piece of--"*

Todoroki doesn't back down. He stares his fath--no, Endeavor, he stares *Endeavor* down, and there's so much malice and hatred (and *pain)* in his eyes that Izuku is taken back.

"I'm going to prove it to you," Todoroki snarls. "I'll prove to you today that I can win without using my left side."

The tension spikes. Izuku's chest is full of knots, and he feels like there are chains wrapped around his throat. He watches Endeavor, watches his irritated scowl turn into bone-deep *fury,* and his fists are still balled, and Todoroki is standing there in front of him, he's close, he's close enough, *Endeavor could hurt him*--

Izuku is *this close* to firing up One For All and bringing down his and the ex-holders' shared fury, but he doesn't get the chance to.

“Time’s just about up, kiddies! Please return to the arena, we will be starting the one-on-one matches in thirty minutes!” comes Midnight’s voice over the intercon, and Izuku, Endevor, and Todoroki all raise their heads.

“I have to go,” Todoroki says, and he spins on his heel and storms off down the hall, away from Izuku and Endeavor.

“Shouto.”

Todoroki stops. “What do you want.”

“I’m disappointed in you.”

There’s a beat. Todoroki doesn’t flinch.

“...Good. If you were proud of me, I’d know I’m doing something wrong.”

He keeps walking. Izuku watches him go, and eventually, Endeavor scowls and turns, storming off in the opposite direction.

He’s unknowingly walking straight towards Izuku.

Izuku hates being passed through. It doesn’t hurt, it just feels...weird. Plus, just the mentality of it is kinda weird to think about, too, the fact that someone is going straight through him--

But he also knows how uncomfortable it is to the person who passes through him, and he knows it affects them more than it affects him.

So, when Endeavor walks, Izuku walks to meet him.

He passes straight through Endeavor and Endeavor passes straight through him.

Endeavor stops like he’d been slammed into by a wall, and he looks around stupidly for a moment or two. The anger is mostly gone, replaced with confusion--and maybe a little bit of fear.

Then, he shakes it off, turns, and keeps walking.

There isn’t a lot Izuku can do right now; he has thirty minutes before the matches start up again, but time flies fast, and he still has to go retrieve his body.

But later. He’s never haunted anyone before, but he’d be damned if he

didn't let Endeavor be the first.

Izuku retrieves his body and drops Howler off with Recovery Girl in record time, and then he's running back down the hall and towards the arena.

He turns a corner abruptly and promptly smashes into Todoroki.

Fitting, he thinks.

They both stumble backwards, but neither of them lose their balance. Izuku rubs his head for a moment, but he's used to bruises, so it doesn't faze him much.

"S-Sorry, that was my fault!" Izuku says immediately, waving his hands back and forth. "I-I wasn't looking where I was going…"

Todoroki doesn't really answer. He's stoic again, the anger and malice gone, but now that Izuku looks closer, he sees pain in Todoroki's eyes.

"I was looking for you," Todoroki says simply, straightening up and lowering his hand back to his side. "Do you have a few minutes?"

"E-Erm, sure," Izuku says, nodding. They're alone here; no one else is around to hear the conversation. "What do you want to talk about…?"

"I'm sorry for my timing earlier," Todoroki says without missing a beat. "I don't withdraw my declaration, but my timing was poor. I'm sorry I didn't read the situation better."

"N-No, that's okay," Izuku says, shaking his head. He shifts his weight and rubs his forearm idly. "I'm sorry I got so angry earlier…"

He isn't sure what Todoroki feels, but to Izuku, the awkwardness is *intense.*

"Also, there's something else," Todoroki says, and Izuku listens. "I've been wondering this for quite some time now, and I have to know… your Quirk. The mutation one."

Izuku's train of thought derails. *Oh, no…*

"It reminds me of All Might's," Todoroki states, and it's a fact. "So, Midoriya...I have to ask…"

Izuku swallows hard. "Fire away."

Todoroki blinks, and it's only now that Izuku realized what it is he just said. Todoroki doesn't comment, even though Izuku is mentally kicking himself in the butt.

"I was wondering," Todoroki goes on, and Izuku waits and listens and holds his breath, "are you...All Might's secret love child or something?"

Izuku blinks. "What."

"You," Todoroki says, like he hadn't even asked such a question at all. "Are you All Might's illegitimate kid."

"PFFFFF--"

"HOLY CRAP I'M DYING, OH MY GOSH--"

"I'M ALREADY DEAD *AND I'M STILL DYING--!"*

"Wellp. Looks like this is your legacy now, Toshi. Nice."

For a moment, Izuku stares.

And then it clicks.

"WAITWAITWAITWAITWAIT," Izuku shrieks, waving his hands back and forth. "How can...how can you ask someone that with a straight face!?"

Todoroki *does* ask it with a straight face, though. And of course he does, because he's, well...Todoroki.

"You're dodging the question," Todoroki says, more suspiciously this time. "Are you, or are you not?"

Zip.

And Izuku's body hits the floor.

Todoroki doesn't bat an eye. "I'll take that as a yes, then."

" *Crap no!"* Izuku screeches, darting back into his body and leaping off the ground, ignoring new bruises. "I-It's not like that, you just c-caught me off-guard! I-I mean, no, I'm not All Might's--nononono, it's not like that, I-I mean it's not like I'd tell you if it was like that either so I don't expect you to believe me but I swear it's not like that at all!"

“Smooth. Freaking smooooooth.”

“Way to go, kiddo.”

Todoroki frowns at him. “The way you worded that,” he says, and Izuku stops, calming down now that the subject has changed. “‘It’s not like that,’ you said. So you have a connection with All Might that you can’t talk about.”

Izuku chews on his lip for just a moment. “I-I--”

“I’m not here to pry answers out of you,” Todoroki cuts in, and Izuku snaps his teeth together to shut himself up. “If you can’t talk about it, or don’t want to talk about it, that’s your business, not mine.”

Izuku breathes a sigh of relief.

“However.”

The sigh of relief is cut short.

“You *do* have a connection with All Might,” Todoroki goes on. “And as such...I need to beat you. I have my convictions, have my reasons. If you have something from the man himself, then…”

Izuku bites his lip, not really knowing what to say. “I…”

And Todoroki tells him his story. His whole story, from start to finish, and Izuku listens, taking in every word and *holding it,* grasping it, feeling *sick* because of it. Todoroki tells him about his family, about his father, about the mother who’d poured boiling water over him, about the siblings he wasn’t allowed to interact with, about his family of abuse and fear and *pain.*

And Izuku listens, shell-shocked, not saying a word. He thinks back to what he’d seen in that hallway, thinks back to Endeavor’s balled fists and Todoroki’s anger and hatred and malice.

“So now you see why I need to beat you,” Todoroki concludes. “I’ll beat you, and I’ll prove to him that I can do it without using his fire.”

He leaves after that, and Izuku doesn’t stop him. He says nothing, turning over this new information in his head, half his stomach in his throat. For a moment--and he’s not quite sure why--he thinks of the scars on his spirit, scars he’d never been able to explain but were always there, showing up at random times for no apparent reason.

He wonders what Todoroki's spirit looks like.

And Izuku makes a conscious decision in that hallway. As Todoroki walks away and Izuku watches him leave, he makes a conscious decision. A promise.

He's going to save Todoroki Shouto.

Chapter End Notes

ALSO
breaks down door
THERE'S A CHANCE
smashes table w/ a hammer
THAT I WON'T
grabs a chainsaw
BE ABLE TO RESPOND TO COMMENTS INDIVIDUALLY LIKE 75% OF THE TIME.
There's just. So many of you. And I love you all dearly and your support means the world to me but I don't have time I'm so sorry wheaksdhk. SO I HAVE DECIDED THAT RATHER THAN RESPONDING TO COMMENTS INDIVIDUALLY EACH CHAPTER, I WILL WRITE A SPECIAL "THANK YOU" IN THE ENDING AUTHOR'S NOTE OF EACH CHAPTER THAT WAY I CAN STILL TELL YOU GUYS HOW MUCH I LOVE YOU AND WHAT YOUR SUPPORT MEANS TO ME. :D :D :D

Anyway that's about it! I wrote this on the way to another dr. appt. so yeah hkjdahskjd. The next chapter's underway so I should be able to update soon! :D

THANK YOU ALL SO MUCH FOR YOUR SUPPORT AND FOR ALL YOUR LOVELY COMMENTS, I LOVE YOU ALL SO MUCH!! Until next time, go beyond! PLUS ULTRA!!!!!!!!!!!!

A Million Dreams

Chapter Summary

"A Million Dreams" from The Greatest Showman

"They can say, they can say it all sounds crazy.
They can say, they can say I've lost my mind.
I don't care, I don't care, so call me crazy,
We can live in a world that we design."

Chapter Notes

Y'ALL READY FOR THIS???

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Toshinori is worried about Izuku.

The kid has seemed... *off,* for literally the whole day thus far. He did outstandingly in the preliminary rounds--he came first in both of them--but even so, Toshinori has an odd sinking feeling that something is wrong, that there's something the boy isn't *telling him.*

Toshinori bumps into him for the second time that day, as Izuku heads one way towards the waiting room and Toshinori heads the other, towards the teacher's seats to watch.

"Midoriya," Toshinori says, smiling softly. "Did you manage to get any sleep, or--"

He stops short, feet going still and eyes going wide.

Izuku is *fuming.*

The boy's eyes are narrowed, balled fists swinging back and forth at his sides as he power-walks, and he has this *look* in his eyes that screams *dangerdangerdanger* in rapid session, like he's on his way to gouge someone's eyes out. Toshinori can feel it, actually; he can physically *feel* the anger and malice rolling off his successor in waves.

The boy. Is *seething.*

"Midoriya," Toshinori says, taken aback, "what's wrong?"

"Nothing is wrong," Izuku answers in a low, dark voice that belies his

actual words. The bruise-like circles beneath his eyes do nothing to ease Toshinori's rising concern. "I have to go get ready for my match, but--Endeavor. You know Endeavor, don't you?" It's more a statement than a question.

Toshinori frowns, confused, but he nods anyway. "Yeah, I know him," he says, "he's the number two hero. He doesn't particularly like me, but I harbor no hard feelings--"

"Don't trust him." The words are hissed, sharp, *dangerous,* unlike anything Toshinori's heard from the boy before.

Toshinori blinks. "What?"

"Don't trust him," Izuku repeats, looking him in the eye. "I don't care what you think about him, you can't trust him."

Toshinori studies the boy's face for a moment or two. He has seen Izuku frustrated, has seen Izuku upset, has seen Izuku scared and happy and sad and hurt...

But *this...this* is new. It's the first time Toshinori has seen the kid so *blatantly furious.*

"I can't explain it right now," Izuku says, and Toshinori is brought back to the present by the malice in his voice, "but don't trust Endeavor. No matter what happens, *do not trust him."*

The boy's behavior right now is sending off millions of red flags in his head, and Toshinori has no reason not to believe him, because this is odd behavior for Izuku. Toshinori *knows* this boy, knows that he can look past people's flaws and see them for who they truly are inside, knows that he likes to see the best in people.

And he isn't doing that now.

"Alright, my boy," Toshinori says, "alright. I'll keep an eye out for him, okay?"

Izuku nods stiffly. His stance doesn't change. "Thank you," he says, and he keeps walking, storming down the hall at a brisk, "don't-you-dare-stop-me" kind of pace. Toshinori watches him go, not quite knowing what just happened.

But he takes it seriously either way. It's hard not to, what with the murderous look in Izuku's eyes and the red-hot fury of his voice.

Izuku heads back to the stands; his classmates are there, seated to watch the one-on-one matches until it's their turn.

"Hey, Midoriya, you're back!" Kirishima grins and rushes up to meet him, waving a hand to get his attention. "Just in time, too, your match is first—" Kirishima screeches to a halt, and his eyes go wide. *"Dude, what happened."*

"I'm fine," Izuku says, smiling. "Also, I'm lowkey gonna strangle someone."

Kirishima eeps and leaps backwards, nearly tripping over one of the seats in the stand. "DUDE, WHAT *HAPPENED."*

"There isn't much time to explain," Izuku says, brushing it off for now. "My match is first, isn't it? The one-on-one matches?"

"Well, yeah," says Kirishima—and then, he stops. "Oh, hold on a minute...Ojirou was looking for you a second ago. Said there was something important he needed to tell you."

Izuku frowns. He pushes aside his anger at Endeavor for the time being; unless he approaches these fights with a clear mind, he's going to end up losing. Horribly.

"Midoriya! There you are!"

Izuku and Kirishima turn; Ojirou sprints towards them, looking frantic.

"Hey!" says Kirishima, waving a hand again. "I was just telling Midoriya here you were looking for him…"

"What's up?" Izuku asks, curious.

"I've gotta talk to you about the guy you're fighting," Ojirou pants. "I hate to say it, but you're gonna have to drop your quips and jabs for this match."

Izuku hears the information, but his brain refuses to compute. "I have to do what, you say?"

Some kind of brainwashing Quirk, apparently. Izuku's opponent has some kind of brainwashing Quirk that he can only activate on people who verbally respond to him.

The answer is simple: Izuku just has to keep his mouth shut throughout the match. It sounds simple in his head, of course, but he knows carrying it out is going to be a totally different thing altogether.

“Hey, we could always remind you not to talk, y’know, if you think that would help.”

“No, that wouldn’t be fair,” Izuku says, shaking his head. “I appreciate the offer, but, I mean...I want to win this on my own. If I get outside help, I mean, I just...I wouldn't be able to accept the victory.”

“Meh, suit yourself. And technically, we're more 'inside' help than 'outside' help, but whatever.”

“You don't need us, man, you'll be great either way. Just remember not to respond to Shinsou and you'll be good to go!”

Izuku nods, but he already knows it's easier said than done. Quips and puns and just *talking* in general are a huge help when he's fighting or nervous; he isn't sure how he'll be able to handle it if that's taken away from him.

“You'll be great, just do your best. You don't need us anyway, you'll be fine on your own.”

“Thanks, Nana,” Izuku says—and then, he leaves the waiting room and heads for the arena.

The time has come.

“And now, the moment you've all been waiting for!” Present Mic's voice booms; he's taken over for Midnight during the one-on-one matches, considering he had a better commentator's voice. *“The first bracket of the Sports Festival kicks off with two polar opposite competitors! Someone who stands in the background, and no one quite knows how he got here, it's Shinsou Hitoshi from General Studies!”*

The crowds clap and whoop and cheer as Shinsou steps onto the arena.

“Versus—! He came first in the entrance exam and has led all the way since! Give it up for Midoriya Izuku, from the Hero Course!”

Izuku steps up onto the arena, standing at the far end across from

Shinsou. Shinsou stares him down, looking every bit as furious as Izuku currently feels.

Present Mic starts the countdown, and Shinsou opens his mouth to speak--or, rather, to lay down his first attack.

“Hold on just a sec,” Izuku says, putting up a finger, and Shinsou stops, looking confused. When Shinsou glares at him, Izuku grins. “Let me have the first word here, why don’tcha?”

He figures, if he can’t *answer* Shinsou without getting brainwashed…

…He’ll get all the jitters out now with this opening speech. After that’s done, well, he’ll be able to fight without nearly as many knots in his chest.

Shinsou opens his mouth again; Izuku plunges forward.

“Y’know, we’re kinda in the same boat here, if you think about it,” Izuku says, stepping forward. “I can’t use my power without breaking myself--” *Or,* he corrects, *at least the power the rest of the world knows me by,* “--and you can’t use your power unless I talk back to you.”

Shinsou’s eyes narrow. “So he told you,” he growls. “That stupid *monkey* must have told you. There’s no other way you’d know.”

Oh.

Oh.

Izuku snaps his teeth together, but he wants so *badly* to say something. It almost physically pains him to hold back and keep his lips sealed.

Now it’s Shinsou’s turn to smile. “You know, I’m kind of jealous of you,” he says, stepping forward. There’s still a lot of space between them, but it’s smaller now than it was at the start of the fight. “You’ve got that really flashy Quirk, don’t you? Consider me envious.”

Envious of my Quirk, huh? Izuku thinks, glaring. *Boy, you have* no idea…

“It must be nice,” Shinsou barks, “to be born with the ideal Quirk. With a Quirk the rest of the world can’t hold against you!”

Oh.

Oh.

Oh, *no*--

Izuku charges.

"Hey, Kacchan, look! I got my Quirk!"

Kacchan frowns at him. "Are you serious?" he asks. "C'mon, there's no way you *got a Quirk. You're* Deku, *remember?"*

"Nonono, I did!" Izuku insists, bouncing up and down. "Mom took me to the doctor yesterday and when we came home I had it! Watch, Kacchan! Watchwatchwatchwatch--!"

"Okay, okay, fine, I'll watch!" Kacchan snaps immediately. "I'll watch, just--ACK!"

Izuku's body hits the ground and his ghost hovers over it. Kacchan shrieks *and springs backwards, eyes wide and full of horror.*

"What the heck is that!?" Kacchan yells, pointing. "Deku, what did you do!?"

"It's my Quirk!" Izuku says, beaming even though Kacchan can't see him. "Did you see it, Kacchan? Isn't it cool?"

"Cool!?" Kacchan repeats, eyes still wide. "No, it's not! It's not cool at all!"

Izuku blinks. "...What?"

Izuku throws a punch at Shinsou's face.

Shinsou jumps to the side, barely avoiding Izuku's fist, but he's grinning now. He'd meant to bring out Izuku's anger and he succeeded, and Izuku knows this, he *knows this,* but he's so angry and so much has happened today, and now he's *remembering* things, things he'd rather forget--

Izuku pulls back his middle finger with his thumb and flicks off a blast with One For All without thinking.

The wind pressure blasts Shinsou off his feet, but it blasts Izuku backwards, too, nearly throwing him out of bounds. His shoes scrape the cement as he's blown back, and he just, *just* manages to stay in the arena.

Izuku grits his teeth, pain spiking through his broken fingers. *That was stupid,* he thinks, reeling. *That was really, really stupid--*

Shinsou is better off than he is, farther away from the white line, and he grins and straightens up.

"That's right," Shinsou says, approaching steadily, "someone like you *wouldn't* know, would you? *You* have the perfect Quirk, of *course* you'd have *no idea* what it's like to grow up and spend your whole life being called 'scary' or 'freaky.'"

Stop it, Izuku thinks, ducking his head. *Stop it, stop it, stop it…*

"You have *no idea* what it's like, do you!?"

Stopitstopitstopit--!

"You have no idea what it's like to be called a *monster!"*

Izuku freezes.

"You can drop dead! That's not normal, that's scary!"

"I-It's n-not technically dropping dead," Izuku tries explaining, but it doesn't work, he knows it doesn't. "I-I just, I mean, I just leave my body for a little while, but I can go back--!"

"It's scary!" the little girl shrieks, pointing at him. Around her stand the rest of Izuku's kindergarten classmates, all with the same look in their eyes. "It's like you're dead! That can't be real!"

"I-I mean, i-it's just--"

"Monster!" one of them shouts suddenly, pointing accusingly. "You have to be a monster! That's the only reason for it, you're a monster!"

Izuku feels like he's been stabbed. "T-T-That's…I-I'm not--"

Shinsou's knee slams into his stomach, and Izuku stumbles backwards, bile in his throat.

Well.

At least the pain jarrs him back into reality where he belongs.

He raises his head, sets his sights on Shinsou, and charges again. Shinsou grins at him, and Izuku is having a really, really hard time keeping his emotions under control.

The memories aren't helping any, either.

"You said that we're alike, you and I," Shinsou growls, "but we couldn't be more different!"

"Shut up!" Izuku snaps.

And then he realizes his mistake a second later. His body goes rigid, and his mind fills with fog, a fog that isn't his but rather someone else's. It's an intruder, something there that shouldn't be there.

Shinsou grins, and Izuku knows now that he's been beat.

"Turn around," Shinsou says--no, *commands,* "and walk out of bounds."

Izuku's feet move and he doesn't want them to. He doesn't want his feet to move and he doesn't want to walk out of bounds but he can't stop, he can't stop himself, there's nothing he can do to stop his body from moving--

Wait.

Shinsou might be able to control his mind, but…

...Can he control Izuku's *spirit?*

Only one way to find out, Izuku thinks, and he concentrates. His feet are moving towards the white line painted on the outskirts of the arena; he's going to go out of bounds, he's going to go out of bounds and he's going to lose, he's going to fail everyone who's counting on him, he's going to fail Toshinori and Mom and the previous holders and *Todoroki*--

He yanks his ghost out of his body.

It actually *hurts,* which is weird because it's never hurt before, but he supposes it makes sense; after all, he's tearing his spirit away from his mind. Of course it's going to hurt.

Once he's out of his body he's free, and a second later, he zips back into his body, before it hits the ground. He opens his eyes and gasps for breath, his feet finally stilling. The fog is gone from his mind,

snapped out of him by the sensation of his spirit being forcefully yanked out of his body.

He has a way to counter Shinsou's brainwashing.

He spins around. Shinsou is staring at him, wide-eyed and horrified. He's freaking out, Izuku can tell, but he's quick to try and regain his composure.

"How did you do that?" Shinsou demands.

Izuku smiles. "Magic," he says--and then he yanks himself out of his body, just for a moment, to jerk himself out of Shinsou's brainwashing. He feels serious whiplash the second time, and he feels insanely dizzy for a moment or two, but either way, he has a way to counter Shinsou's Quirk.

He can do this now.

"You shouldn't be able to break out of it like that," Shinsou snaps. "How are you able to do that, huh? What did you do?"

Izuku doesn't answer directly. Rather, he takes off running, mouth curving in a grin now that he has a way to fight.

"Alright, Shinsou!" Izuku says, then snaps his ghost out and back in his body. The dizziness is worse this time, and his throat burns, but he keeps going anyway. "You've lectured me long enough! Now it's *my* turn!"

Shinsou is beginning to lose his cool. He stumbles back as Izuku charges forward, barely managing to avoid Izuku's punch.

"Let me tell you a thing!" Izuku snaps, lunging at him again; Shinsou dodges sloppily, teeth gritted, eyes narrowed. "It sucks, okay!? It sucks that we're judged by things we can't control! It sucks that people use literally whatever they can against us! It sucks they take what could be our greatest strengths and turn them into weaknesses!"

"Shut up!" Shinsou snaps furiously, and he lunges, too, grabbing Izuku by the forearm and yanking him, trying to fling him out of bounds. "You have *no idea--!"*

"HOW ABOUT YOU *SHUT UP!?"* Izuku snaps, and he dissociates for just a second, then slams his head against Shinsou's, successfully headbutting him. Pain bounces through his skull, but he doesn't back

down. “SHUT UP FOR A SECOND AND *THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU’RE DOING!”*

Shinsou stares at him, wide-eyed, and Izuku takes this moment to slam his fist into Shinsou’s face. Shinsou stumbles backwards, hands over his mouth and nose, and Izuku springs at him again.

“Listen to what you’re saying!” Izuku shouts through gritted teeth, swinging; Shinsou sees him and dodges in the nick of time. “You’re getting angry at people who put you down because of your Quirk, and what are you doing here!? Beating down people with stronger Quirks!? Because, oh, how *dare* they be born with a power stronger than yours! They *obviously* did that on purpose just to hurt you, right!?”

Shinsou grits his teeth. “You don’t--!”

“If you tell me I don’t know how this feels, *one more time,* I am going to *SCREAM!”* Izuku screeches. “You’re lamenting the fact that people judge others by their Quirks, and you’re over here doing the *same damn thing!* So what if other people have strong Quirks!? It’s not like they got to *choose* what kind of Quirk they were born with!”

Shinsou swings at him, successfully landing another punch to Izuku’s jaw, but it isn’t a solid punch. Shinsou is not a trained fighter.

“I’ve got a newsflash for you!” Izuku shouts, and he reaches out, grabbing Shinsou’s forearm and yanking him forward. *“NOT ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL!”*

Shinsou struggles, kicking and fighting back. His knee slams into Izuku’s stomach again, and Izuku chokes but doesn’t let go. It hurts but he doesn’t let go. This is important.

“We don’t choose the power we’re born with!” Izuku yells, and he swings Shinsou around. His moments are fluent, relaxed; he’s done this often enough to be good at it. “You of all people should *know that,* Shinsou!”

He pulls Shinsou over his shoulder and decks him back-first into the cement, the lower half of Shinsou’s legs crossing over the white out-of-bounds line.

Izuku stands there, panting, breathing heavily, as the crowds roar and clap around them. He’s insanely dizzy, and more than anything, he wants to lie down, maybe throw up once or twice, and not get up for a long time.

He hears Midnight's voice, faintly, declaring him the winner, but he doesn't care. He's focused on Shinsou, now sitting up, teeth gritted, palms pressed flat against the ground on either side.

He isn't angry at Izuku anymore.

He's frustrated with *himself*.

Izuku swallows hard and looks down at his shoes, fists balling at his sides.

"...Believe me," Izuku says slowly, "I know what it's like. I know how much it *sucks* to want to do something, and then...and then be told your whole life that...that you can never do it."

"Freaky! Creepy!"

"You can't be human, there's no way!"

"Humans don't drop dead! You must be some kind of a monster!"

"You can't be a hero with a Quirk like that!"

"You can't be a hero with a Quirk that scares people!"

"So..." Izuku raises his head and meets Shinsou's eyes. "...Prove them wrong!"

Shinsou's eyes go wide.

"Yeah, you heard me!" Izuku says. "All those people who told you that you can't do it, all those people that told you you're a monster, all those people who told you that you can't be a hero...prove them wrong, Shinsou! Leave them behind you, stand up, and show the world, 'This is who I am! This is me, and I'm going to be proud of it!'"

He feels like a hypocrite, considering he's still only just learning this himself, but that doesn't stop him.

"And, anyway…" Izuku looks down again, and absentmindedly, he touches the bell around his neck. "...It isn't going to be this way forever. It hurts now, and your pain is valid, but...it's going to get better, I promise."

"I really like 'Deku'!"

"We're glad you're okay, buddy!"

“Midori-chan!”

“Shinsou…what you’re going through now isn’t the way it’s going to be forever,” Izuku goes on. “Your future isn’t left behind on this arena. Your future isn’t what people think about you, or the labels people smack on you. Your future is out there, waiting, but...you have to seize it. You have to grab on with both hands...and never let go.”

“Aww, kiddo…”

Izuku smiles, and the tears that fill his eyes have nothing to do with the physical pain he’s feeling. He offers Shinsou his hand, and Shinsou takes it, letting Izuku pull him to his feet. Neither let go just yet.

“...You’re going to be a hero, Shinsou,” Izuku says firmly. “You’re going to be an *amazing* hero, I know you will. So...go for it. Go for it, and shine like the shooting star you are.”

Chapter End Notes

Find me on tumblr! :D <3

WHOO this chapter was fun! Stinkin' crazy, but fun! :D And the next one's gonna be eVEN MORE CRAZY OH MY GOSH--

Anyway, I wanted to let y'all know I'll be slowing down a bit with my updates--probably gonna be posting once a week rather than every day/two days, just to keep my sanity in-check. XD But yeah, still pretty consistant! :D

Anyway, as for the thank-you to those who commented last chapter:

I REALLY LOVE YOU GUYS AND THANKS FOR BEING COOL WITH ME NOT RESPONDING ALL THE TIME WHEKSHDKdf. I'M SO HAPPY YOU LIKE THE STORY AND EVERYTHING I DID WITH THAT LAST CHAPTER!!! THAT MAKES ME REALLY HAPPY AND I LOVE YOU ALL SO MUCH!!! :D :D :D :D :D

Until next time, go beyond! PLUS ULTRA!!!!!!!!!!!!

The Greatest Show

Chapter Summary

"The Greatest Show" from The Greatest Showman

"It's everything you ever want,
It's everything you ever need.
And it's here right in front of you,
This is where you wanna be."

Chapter Notes

HEY SURPRISE EVERYONE IT'S A CHAPTER.

AND ALSO THERE'S MORE ART YAY THANK YOU!!!! :D

aygerim-nk

THANKS YOU SO MUCH!!!! :D :D :D :D :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“You could have done it without breaking your fingers,” Recovery Girl snaps, arms crossed over her chest. “What exactly were you thinking?”

Izuku pulls his hand back towards himself; his middle finger and thumb are individually bandaged, and he runs his fingers on his other hand over the gauze for a moment or two.

“Yeah, that’s the problem,” he says. “I *wasn’t* thinking.”

Recovery Girl lets out a long, heaving sigh. “Of course,” she says, throwing up her hands in defeat. “Of course you weren’t. Heaven forbid the boy should think before he breaks his bones.”

Howler gives Izuku a quizzical look, and Izuku shrugs. He’d expected Recovery Girl to be mad at him; she usually is, and she usually has good reason for it, too. He doesn’t make it hard for people to be angry with him.

“Try to think about what you’re doing to yourself a little more,” Recovery Girl tells him, and Izuku turns back to her. “I won’t always be around to heal your injuries, and you can’t keep hurting yourself like this, anyways. It isn’t good.”

“I know,” Izuku says, nodding. “Thank you. I’m gonna…go watch the rest of the matches now.”

Recovery Girl waves a hand at him. “Fine, fine, have fun. Don’t do anything stupid in your next match.”

Izuku nods, but he makes no promises. He isn’t sure he’d be able to keep them if he did.

“Hey, Deku!” Uraraka says, waving him over; she scoots over a seat, and he sits down next to her. Howler immediately lays down at Izuku’s feet and waits. “You did great in the fight! That was really awesome!”

“Thanks!” Izuku says, beaming, and then, he turns his attention back to the arena. “Who’s up next?”

“Todoroki and Sero,” Uraraka answers, following his gaze. “Iida already went to the waiting room to get ready, he’s up right after them.”

Izuku nods, then swallows thickly. As much as he hates underestimating his classmates, Sero going up against Todoroki…the matchup doesn’t seem fair at all.

“Who do you think’s going to win, Midoriya?” Kirishima asks, leaning his arms on the backs of Uraraka’s and Izuku’s seats in front of him. “I mean, honestly, I’m kinda putting my money on Todoroki, but Sero’s pretty tough, too.”

“We shouldn’t count Sero out yet,” Kaminari says, putting up a finger. “He might not look like much compared to fire and ice, ‘I got in on recommendations’ kid over there, but, I mean--”

“No,” Izuku says, a lump in his throat, “Sero doesn’t stand a chance.”

“WHAT!?” Kaminari and Kirishima say at once, staring at him.

“Hey, dude, you can’t go saying that!” Kirishima plunges on. “That’s not what we should be sayin’ right now, y’know?”

“Sorry,” Izuku says, shaking his head, “but…”

He watches, as do the others, as Todoroki and Sero step onto the battlefield and Present Mic announces their match. Izuku thinks back to the USJ, to what he’d told Shigaraki; and then, he thinks about

Todoroki's convictions, Todoroki's determination and drive.

"...When you're fighting for something that matters to you…"

Present Mic's voice booms, *"START!"* across the arena.

The fight is over in a snap.

A glacier of ice shoots from the ground up, effortlessly encasing and immobilizing Sero. Todoroki stands there, triumphant, as Present Mic's confused, startled voice declares him the winner.

"...It's a lot easier to win."

"Wellp," Kirishima says, wide-eyed, as Todoroki melts the ice away with his left side, "you weren't wrong, dude, but *man,* was that overkill. Hey, wait a minute." He stops, then turns to stare at Izuku with wide-eyes. "The way the bracket was set up, this means--"

"Yeah," Izuku says, nodding. "I'm fighting Todoroki."

"...Dude," Kirishima says, still wide-eyed, "you'd better have a really, really good plan."

"Well...it's...it's a plan. Not sure how *good* it is…"

"Ohh boy. As long as it doesn't end with your getting frozen to death, I mean...well…" He offers a shaky smile and thumbs up. "Good luck!"

"Thanks." The *I'm gonna need it* remains unspoken.

But, when it comes to his and Todoroki's drive and determination, it's anyone's game. Todoroki is determined to prove his father wrong, and Izuku is determined to save Todoroki no matter what the cost.

An unstoppable force and an immovable object.

Should be fun.

The Iida versus Hatsume match is...interesting, but also very tedious. Hatsume cares more about showing off her gadgets than she does actually *winning,* and in the end, the fight concludes with her stepping out of bounds, satisfied, having shown off all her available gadgets to the big companies.

Iida is frustrated, which Izuku supposes only makes sense. In the end,

their fight was used as nothing more than an advertisement for Hatsume's inventions.

"No matter," Iida says, straightening his glasses, "I will do all I can to make sure my next match is something worthwhile. My older brother may be watching this, after all."

"Oh, that's right," Izuku says, snapping his fingers. "Ingenium?"

Iida nods. "He hasn't been answering any calls, though," Iida says, and he frowns at this, then shakes his head. "Maybe he's busy…hold on, where did Uraraka go?"

"Uraraka?" Izuku repeats, turning. "She was right--"

She's gone. She'd been there a second ago, but now she's gone.

"...That's...weird," Izuku says, frowning. "I didn't even notice her leaving…?"

"Um…" Kirishima's voice turns both Izuku and Iida's attention to him, and he points at the screen displaying the brackets in the arena. "I think I know why she left."

Izuku and Iida look. Next up is Mina against Aoyama, then Tokoyami against Yaoyorozu, then Kirishima against Tetsutetsu, and then, it's Uraraka against--

Oh.

Oh, *no*.

Izuku (with Howler hot on his heels) and Iida find Uraraka in the waiting room just before her match begins. The Kirishima versus Tetsutetsu match is currently underway, which means, next up…

...Uraraka is fighting Bakugou.

"O-Oh, it's you," Uraraka says, raising her head and brushing her hair out of her face. She's sitting on a chair at the table in the waiting room. "W-What are you two doing here…?"

Izuku and Iida exchange glances--and then, Izuku takes a step forward. "I have a strategy you can use against Kach--I mean, against Bakugou," Izuku says, but he already has an idea of how she's going to answer.

“Oh, Uraraka-san, he has a strategy!” Iida says; he seems much more enthusiastic about this than Uraraka. “Maybe you can beat Bakugou after all!”

Izuku elbows him in the ribs; he knows Iida doesn’t mean it, but his bluntness is *not* what Uraraka needs right now. Iida gets the hint quickly, and he and Izuku remain silent and await Uraraka’s reaction.

“I...I appreciate the offer, Deku,” Uraraka says, looking down at her hands, “but...I can’t accept it.”

Izuku expected nothing less. He’d felt the same way when offered help by the previous holders.

“L-Listen…” Uraraka bites her lip. “Deku, you’ve...you’ve always been incredible. You’re smart, you’re brave, and...during the cavalry battle, w-when I said I thought it’d be better to team up with friends...I think I was really just trying to rely on you.”

Izuku swallows thickly. “Don’t say that,” he says, “you’re amazing, Uraraka-san--”

“Still,” Uraraka cuts in, “I haven’t forgotten, Deku. Back at the USJ, when you stayed behind to fight back against the villains…”

There’s a beat, a moment. She clenches her fists.

“All I did was run.”

Izuku swallows and opens his mouth to say something, but he doesn’t get the chance to. Uraraka goes on.

“And that’s why... *now…”*

She pushes back her chair and gets to her feet, standing before the two of them. She smiles, and it’s wobbly and nonreassuring, but she punches her fist into her open palm as determination gleams in her eyes.

“Deku...Iida...I’ll see you in the finals.”

Izuku and Iida exchange glances again, nod, and look back at Uraraka.

“See you there,” Iida agrees, and Izuku grins at her. Uraraka beams at the both of them in return, and shortly after, Present Mic’s voice in the intercon calls Uraraka to the battlefield.

She loses.

She fought all the way through, endured blow after blow and blast after blast, and she'd come up with a fantastic strategy that almost, *almost* beat Bakugou.

It was close. It was so, so, so, *so painstakingly close.*

But in the end, Bakugou had thwarted her attack. She'd *lost.*

And now, Izuku runs, feet pounding and Howler racing alongside him. He can't imagine how upset she is, the disappointment she's feeling. She'd worked so hard, fought so long, and in the end...even though she'd exhausted all efforts and pushed herself to her limits and then some…

...She'd come short. It *hadn't been enough.*

Izuku doesn't knock; the door slams the wall as he throws it open and tumbles inside.

Uraraka is sitting at the table again, and she jumps at the sudden noise, almost dropping her phone. She looks unharmed for the most part; there's a wad of gauze taped over a scratch on her cheek, and her shoulders are slumped in exhaustion, but she seems alright.

Physically, anyway.

"O-Oh, Deku!" Uraraka greets, beaming, and she rubs the back of her neck. "W-Well, I lost, I guess! Darn, and I was sure I had it there at the last second! Guess I have a long way to go, right?"

It sounds forced. Izuku would know; he's faked smiles and laughter more times than he cares to admit.

"Are you...are you alright?" he ventures. "I mean, it looked...it looked pretty brutal out there…"

"Oh, yeah, I'm fine!" Uraraka says, beaming. "Recovery Girl patched me up, so I'm good to go! I guess I'm really just…" She pauses, looking away for a moment. "...I guess I'm just frustrated is all. I really thought I could beat him…"

"You will," Izuku says, without thinking. "You'll be able to beat Bakugou someday soon, Uraraka, I know you will."

"W-Well, m-maybe someday," Uraraka says, "b-but, for now, I

mean...I've got a long way to go."

She's hiding it. She's frustrated and upset, and she's doing her best to hide it.

He doesn't call her out. That wouldn't help anything. Rather, he smiles.

"Don't worry, you will," he says. "You're already incredible."

She stares at him, then turns away sharply, wiping her face. "T-Thanks, Deku…" Her voice shakes, just a bit, and Izuku's smile turns sad.

"Well, I-I have to go," Izuku says, jabbing his thumb over his shoulder at the door. "My match is next, so, I-I mean…"

"Oh!" Uraraka wipes her eyes, then turns to him sharply. "I-I'm sorry, Deku, you didn't have any time to get ready because I was here--!"

"No, that's okay," Izuku says immediately. "I have to go drop Howler off with Recovery Girl again, anyway, so--"

He stops.

"...Actually, I'm not sure I have time for that," he says, holding out the hand with Howler's leash. "Would you mind watching him for me while I fight? I mean, just have him sit with you. Feel free to pet him, too. As long as he isn't actively, y'know, guarding my body or anything, he isn't technically working, so, go ahead and pet him."

"O-Oh, I-I mean, okay," Uraraka says, taking the leash from his hand, "b-but…"

"Sorry, I don't have time to talk," Izuku says, shaking his head. "I really, really have to go. I'm pushing it as it is."

(He isn't, not really, but this is a lie he can live with telling.)

"You did great out there, Uraraka!" Izuku calls, already turning towards the door. "You're really amazing! Don't forget that!"

He sprints out the door before she has the chance to say otherwise.

Ochako stares at the closed door, confused, but not entirely surprised. She smiles faintly, phone and leash clutched between her fingers, and

she summons her will and calls her parents.

She tells them. She tells them about the match, that she'd lost, and a part of her is expecting disappointment. A part of her is expecting them to be upset with her.

But they aren't. They encourage her, tell her how amazing she was, tell her what a fantastic job she did, and she almost makes it through the conversation without crying, but then Howler rests his head on Ochako's leg and nuzzles her hand and she can't do it, she can't do it anymore.

The tears finally break loose, and Ochako sobs, one hand stroking Howler's head and the other clutching her phone. Her parents encourage her, tell her she's amazing and that she's going to be a wonderful hero, and she sobs and thanks them, tears leaving wet splotches on her clothes.

The call ends shortly thereafter, and she sets her phone on the table and stares at it for a long, long moment.

Howler nudges her hand again, softly but deliberately, and Ochako chokes on another sob, sliding out of her chair until her knees hit the floor and her arms wrap around the dog. Howler doesn't really do anything, just sits there and lets her sob against his fur, and Ochako is thankful for it.

There's no way Deku didn't do this on purpose. There's *no way.*

Thank you, Deku, she thinks, shutting her eyes as tears of frustration and hurt and also *gratitude* pour down her cheeks. *Thank you.*

She'd lost against Bakugou this time, but…

…There will be a next time. She won't lose then.

Izuku can hear her crying from the other side of the door.

He stares at it for a long, long moment, heart clenching, and he debates checking on her, maybe offering her a hug, but he doesn't. She'd tried so hard to hide her tears from him before; barging in now and seeing her sobbing would most like mortify her.

So he turns away. He'd left Howler with her because he knows the dog has been a comfort to him in the past, and he hopes Howler will be an

equal comfort to his friend.

I'm counting on you, Howler, Izuku thinks as he leaves, marching down the hall towards the arena. *This is all on you.*

He keeps walking, heading down the hall towards the arena. He's worried about Uraraka, but he knows she'll be okay. She's strong, and while she's frustrated and upset now, she'll fight through it. She'll barrel through it and come out even stronger.

Now, Izuku has to think about how he's going to fight Todoroki. He has a couple ideas in mind, a couple strategies that may or may not actually work; it's just a matter of trying them out and putting them into play during the match--

"Hey kid--!"

Izuku jumps involuntarily; the ex-holders had been so silent this past while he's forgotten they're there.

"Oh, whoops, sorry!"

"Dangit, do you really think scaring the kid right before his big match is a good idea?"

"Sorry, I didn't mean to do that!"

"It's alright," Izuku says, his heart rate slowing down to a normal tempo once again. "I forgot you guys were there."

"Well, you told us to be quiet, so we were quiet. Anyway, we wanted to wish you luck on your next match!"

"Yeah, you're fighting that Todoroki kid, right?"

"You're gonna do great, kiddo! Blow 'em away!"

"Thanks," Izuku says. "Again, gonna have to ask that you guys are quiet while I'm fighting. I don't want any outside--"

"Inside, boyo."

"--Right, *inside* help. So, I'd appreciate it--"

A foot or so ahead of him, Endeavor turns the corner.

Izuku freezes immediately, one foot still in the air. It takes Endeavor a

moment or two to notice him, actually, but when he does, his eyes cut over to Izuku.

“Oh,” he says, turning. He’s blocking Izuku’s way. “It’s you.”

“Whaddya know. I was unaware flaming piles of garbage could talk.”

“The more you know~”

“Hey, kiddo, kick him where it counts. Subtly.”

“I’m not sure that’s something you can do subtly--”

“Then don’t do it subtly.”

“I saw your fight against that General Studies kid,” Endeavor says, and the voices in Izuku’s head still to listen. “I--”

“Shinsou,” Izuku cuts in. “His name is Shinsou.”

Endeavor frowns at him. “Alright, then, *Shinsou.* I watched your fight, and your Quirk...it reminds me of All Might’s.”

“Ya don’t say? Huh. Who woulda thunk it.”

“Yeah, so?” Izuku questions. It is really, *really* hard to keep his anger in check. “Sometimes people have similar Quirks, it doesn’t mean anything--”

“My son has a duty to surpass All Might,” Endeavor interrupts. “Fighting you could be the first step towards that.”

Izuku grits his teeth. Without him being fully aware of it, his hands ball into fists at his sides.

“If Todoroki beats me,” Izuku says lowly, “it isn’t going to be because he owes something to you. It’s going to be because he’s strong *regardless* of you.”

“Oooo.”

“You tell him, boyo.”

This is the wrong thing to say, and Endeavor glares at him. “No matter,” he says, turning away sharply. “Either way, don’t lose in some pathetic manner, alright? Regardless of what you think, my son has a duty to uphold.”

He walks away, and Izuku stands there, shaking, furious. The words come out of his mouth before he thinks about what he's saying.

"I...am *not* All Might."

He hears Endeavor's footsteps stop. "Well, that's obvi--"

"That's obvious, right?"

Izuku spins around and looks Endeavor in the eyes.

"Todoroki isn't you, either."

He watches the anger pour over Endeavor's face, watches his hands ball into fists, but Izuku isn't afraid. If anything, the only fear he holds is for the people who had (and still have to) live with this man.

Todoroki. Todoroki's family.

But not Endeavor. He isn't afraid of Endeavor.

Izuku turns around and keeps walking. He doesn't run, doesn't sprint, doesn't power-walk; he marches with purpose, balled fists swaying back and forth at his sides.

"Freaking. Mic-drop."

"Smack him down and walk away. I like it."

"Cool kids don't look at the explosions they create."

"Get dunked on, dumpster fire."

Izuku narrows his eyes as he walks, and he thinks back to Todoroki's words, Todoroki's drive, Todoroki's determination.

And then he thinks of his own unspoken promise to Todoroki, his own drive, his own determination.

Unstoppable force and immovable object indeed.

"And now, the moment you've all been waiting for! He got in on recommendations and placed second in both preliminary rounds! Give it up for Todoroki Shouto, Hero Course!"

Todoroki steps up onto the arena, eyes narrowed, balled fists swinging

back and forth as he walks.

"Versus--! He's led all the way thus far with incredible tact! Is it no wonder he came first in the entrance exam!? Here comes Midoriya Izuku, Hero Course!"

Izuku steps onto the field, determined, his stance matching Todoroki's. They stand across from each other, eyes locked.

Izuku flashes a grin. "So," he says idly, examining a fingernail, "do you come here often?"

Todoroki's face doesn't change. "No."

"Hmm." Izuku nods. "Icy."

Todoroki blinks.

"START!" Present Mic's voice booms, and immediately, Izuku's fingers clamp around the wrist of his other hand to brace himself; Todoroki twists his foot into the ground.

The ice shoots forth, small at first but then it grows, gathering, collecting as it heads straight towards Izuku--

I'm sorry, Recovery Girl, Izuku thinks, and then, he pulls back his finger with his thumb and fires off a blast at full power.

The wind pressure slams the glacier to a halt inches away from Izuku; then, the glacier breaks into shards of glass-like ice that fly in all directions.

The shockwave nearly sends Izuku off his feet, but his stance is enough to keep him grounded. Across from him, Todoroki has thrown up a wall of ice behind him to keep him in-bounds for the match.

Smart, smart, Izuku thinks. *Icy what he did there.*

He already used the joke once, sure, and usually he'd be ashamed by using the same joke twice within the same couple of minutes, but--

Another round of ice.

Izuku sends off another blast, breaks another finger, shatters another glacier.

Two fingers down, Izuku counts off, gritting his teeth against the pain.

It's a good thing I used my fingers and not my arms. With that ice wall behind Todoroki...I'd be screwed.

"You want an endurance match," Todoroki snaps, bringing Izuku back to the present, "but I'll end this *quickly!"*

He slams his palm into the ground, bringing up another burst of ice, and Izuku breaks another finger. Three broken so far; he has five more chances. Five more fingers to fire off One For All.

Alright, he thinks, gritting his teeth against the burning pain spiking up his fingers. *Alright, keep it cool, keep it cool…*

He raises his head, and although he can already hear people screaming at him for it, he raises his broken fingers for Todoroki to see. "Hate to *break* it to you, Thermostat," he says, grinning, "but I ain't backing down yet."

Todoroki responds by twisting his foot into the ground again. The ice comes at Izuku faster this time, not as a glacier, though; it's like a bridge, stretching between them, and Todoroki leaps onto it and takes off running, straight towards Izuku along with the ice--

Izuku springs backwards. The ice is close; it snags his boot, and he grits his teeth.

"Yeah, you *wish!"* Izuku snaps, firing up One For All. Golden tendrils spread through his skin, from his fingertips to his shoulder. "Do you *really* think I'm gonna let you win that easy!? Don't make me *laugh!"*

He throws the punch on the final word.

The ice in front of him explodes, and so do the bones in his arm. While the ice blows back and Todoroki throws up a wall to keep himself in-bounds, Izuku hits the ground, teeth clenched. All his fingers are broken, as well as one arm.

He's out of expendables to fire off One For All with.

Izuku raises his head towards his opponent, teeth gritted. Todoroki is straightening up again, taking up his fighting stance once more, and--

Izuku does a double-take.

Todoroki is shaking.

What…? Izuku thinks, frowning. *He's…?*

And then he thinks about the ice Todoroki has been sending at him since the beginning.

Just goes to show, Izuku thinks, teeth gritted behind his lips. *No matter how strong you are, Quirks are still physical abilities. And, like all physical abilities…*

…They have their limits.

His mind ticks like a bomb, forming strategies and theories alike.

He isn't using fire to balance out the ice, which means…

…He can't keep going on like this. He's slowly freezing himself from the inside out. There's not much more he can do.

He looks down at himself, at his broken fingers and arm.

…And, honestly, I can't really keep going on like this for much longer, either…

Todoroki raises his head to Izuku again, breathing heavily. "Well," he says, eyes looking over Izuku's injuries for just a moment, "thanks, at least. Look."

He jerks his head; Izuku follows his gaze. Endeavor is in the stands watching, arms crossed over his chest. It's a long way away and Izuku can't make out his face, but he knows Endeavor is scowling.

"Look at him," Todoroki spits. "Look how pissed he is that I'm not using my left side. You drew that out of him, Midoriya. I suppose I should thank you."

Izuku's teeth are clenched so tightly it's starting to give him a headache.

"Why are you talking like you've won?" Izuku snaps, and Todoroki raises his head to him again, confused. "You don't get it, Todoroki, do you? You haven't won *anything."*

It hurts, it *burns,* but he balls his hand into a fist, broken fingers and all.

"You think you can beat me without using your left side!?" Izuku shouts, head snapping up to meet Todoroki's eyes. "How the *hell* can you say that when you haven't even put a *scratch* on me!?"

Todoroki steps back, but his glare doesn't falter. "You can't fight with those injuries," he states, twisting his shoe into the ground. The ice springs forth. "Let's end this!"

"Oh, but that's where you're *wrong--!"*

Izuku grits his teeth and pulls back his broken finger with his thumb.

"We're just getting started!" Izuku yells, and fires off the blast.

Todoroki's back slams against the wall of ice behind him, and the ice he'd sent at Izuku is blown to bits. Izuku snaps his teeth together again to keep from crying out.

Todoroki straightens up again, a look of horror, shock, and disbelief coming over his usually stoic face. "Really!?" he demands. "With your broken finger!? Why are you going so *far!?"*

More ice. Izuku re-breaks another finger. Todoroki is trembling worse than before, and he sends more ice at Izuku, but--

Izuku can dodge. The ice is slow, a sad comparison to the glaciers Todoroki had been firing at him earlier. Izuku hits the ground, the ice to the left of him, and glares at Todoroki.

"Slowing down on me, are you, Thermostat?" Izuku questions, grinning. "I thought you were gonna end this quickly."

Todoroki doesn't send ice at him this time.

He runs.

Izuku grinds his teeth together, the pain almost unbearable, but he, too, kicks and runs towards his opponent, one arm and all fingers useless.

Todoroki runs.

Izuku runs.

And then something happens.

For an instant--and just, *just* for an instant--Todoroki *flickers.*

His image flickers, and there are scars all over him. Scars, cuts, gashes, old and new, some jagged and long and others faint and barely noticeable. Izuku stares, eyes going wide.

It doesn't last long. It's a flicker, a moment, a second, but..

...Along with the scars…

...There are tears streaming down Todoroki's face.

The moment ends with Todoroki's fist slamming into Izuku's jaw.

Izuku stumbles back, hand of his unbroken arm moving instinctively to cradle his face; a second later, he springs to the side, barely missing Todoroki's ice shooting across the cement.

Todoroki is scarred. Mentally, emotionally, and physically, too.

But he isn't *broken.*

He's damaged but he's *here,* he's strong and he's fighting and he *isn't backing down.*

Todoroki is damaged but not broken.

His spirit is scarred but not shattered.

Izuku grits his teeth against the pain and raises his head. Determination settles deep into his heart, and he retracts his fist.

"You don't have to be a prisoner of your own blood, Todoroki!" Izuku screams, and he balls his broken fingers into a fist and lands slams a punch into Todoroki's stomach. He ignores the choked, strangled sound Todoroki makes and grits his teeth. "Stop fighting yourself and fight *me!"*

Shouto is angry.

He's angry but underneath that is pain. Underneath that, he feels a deep, horrible *sadness* that *will not go away* no matter what he does or how desperately he tries to bury it.

Shouto stumbles backwards, then grits his teeth and narrows his eyes at his opponent. Midoriya is staring at him, breathing heavily, looking like some kind of a *madman,* but Shouto doesn't back down. His resolve is set. He's already decided.

"My father--!"

Midoriya's knee slams into his stomach. *"I DON'T GIVE A* DAMN

ABOUT YOUR FATHER!"

Shouto chokes, but still manages to grab Midoriya's unbroken arm and *twist,* and Midoriya wrenches himself backwards out of his grip.

Shouto has no breathing room. Midoriya takes off after him again.

"You're on *thin ice,* Thermostat, *literally!"* Midoriya shouts. "Who do you think you're hurting by doing this, huh!?"

"Your left side is unsightly…!"

Shouto grits his teeth and sends ice at him, but it's weaker, even Shouto can tell it's weaker, and Midoriya leaps into the air without much hassle.

"You're suppressing yourself because you want to make your father miserable, is that it!?" Midoriya screams, and Shouto springs backwards; Midoriya's feet hit the ground, and he's running again, fists balled, broken fingers and all, and--

Shouto has to do a double-take, actually.

Midoriya.

Is *crying.*

Shouto's hesitation costs him--Midoriya's shin connects with his ribs, and Shouto stumbles to the side, clutching the soon-to-be bruises.

"But what's the *point!?"* Midoriya demands, voice nothing more than a broken shriek. "What's the point of making your father miserable if you make your own life a living hell!? What's the *point,* Todoroki!? *TELL ME!"*

"Shut up!" Shouto yells, and he's the one who attacks this time, grabbing Midoriya's forearms and swinging him around, slamming him into the ground.

Shouto is angry. He's angry and he's hurt and he doesn't know how or why but Midoriya is breaking through the walls he's put up and Shouto can't let him do that. Breaking through those walls means more pain and Shouto's worked so hard to keep those walls up, he can't let them fall, he has to keep them up, he can't let them fall, he can't let his father win--

"Shouto."

Shouto grits his teeth. “Don’t you *dare* preach to me!” he shouts. “I have my own convictions, Midoriya, my own reasons for doing this! My father--!”

Midoriya is on his feet a second later, and he springs forward and body-slams him head-first, the top of his head connecting with Shouto’s chest. Shouto exhales in a rush and stumbles backwards, trips, and crashes to the cement. The tides have turned, and now Midoriya is standing over him, fists balled, tears streaming down his face.

“Your father isn’t *you!”* Midoriya screeches, tears mingling with the sweat on his face. *“You aren’t your father, Todoroki, get that out of your head!”*

“Ah, the son of the number two hero! We expect great things from you!”

Shouto gets to his feet, dazed, and Midoriya rushes at him once again. The memories are flooding him; Shouto can’t think. Midoriya’s saying things, he’s yelling things, and it’s bringing back memories Shouto doesn’t want to remember, it’s bringing back things he’d tried to forget and he *doesn’t want them no stay away stay away stay away--*

“Look at you, Todoroki!” Midoriya screams, throwing a kick. “Just *look at you!”* His shin meets Shouto’s ribs; he stumbles, but doesn’t fall, and a second later, Shouto swings an arm, and his fist collides with Midoriya’s face. Midoriya stumbles back, but doesn’t falter. When he raises his head towards Shouto again, there’s still tears, but there’s also *anger.* And *desperation.*

Stop it, Shouto thinks. *Stop it, stop it, stop it--*

“Hey, your dad’s Endeavor! That’s so cool!”

“Man, I wish my *dad was the number two hero!”*

“You have a fire Quirk, too! Just like your dad! That’s amazing!”

Stop it.

Stop it.

Stop it--!

“You’re literally *freezing your own body!”* Midoriya yells, throwing himself at Shouto. “And I can think of at *least* a dozen reasons why

that is *very not okay!"*

Shouto kicks this time with an indistinguishable shout, his foot slamming into Midoriya's chest, and Midoriya goes flying backwards. He hits the ground tumbling, rolling over thrice before stopping.

But, he gets back up again and runs.

"You're not hurting your father by doing this, Todoroki, believe me! The only person you're hurting is *yourself!"*

Shouto doesn't know why. Memories flood forth; his father beating him, yelling at his siblings, beating his *mother,* and he remembers pain and hurt and *anger, anger, anger, anger, anger--*

He *snaps.*

"SHUT *UP!"*

He swings his arm, his right arm.

He makes a mistake.

Todoroki isn't listening to him.

Izuku knows he isn't listening to him. He knows Todoroki is blinded by anger and malice and pain and he knows it only makes sense why he would be, but the point remains that Todoroki isn't listening to him. He's hearing him but he's not digesting the words.

Izuku should have expected it, really. He should have expected Todoroki to finally snap.

The ice springs forth, and Izuku stumbles back with a sharp cry, clutching his shoulder. He trips, hits the ground; something hot and sticky runs over his fingertips, and he doesn't have to look to know what this means.

Blood.

He's bleeding.

He doesn't feel it yet. He knows he will, but for now, he feels nothing. Except, perhaps, a bit of shock.

He raises his head. Todoroki doesn't look angry anymore, just

horrified. The wall of ice he'd thrown up is jagged; one of the long, spear-like shards of ice is stained with blood.

Todoroki's eyes are wide. Izuku's never seen this kind of look on Todoroki's face before. "...Midoriya..."

The tears fall faster, and Izuku ducks his head, sucking in a sharp, shaky breath. It's at the cost of getting hurt, sure, but…

...Todoroki is listening to him now. Izuku has his attention. It's worth it, then.

"We're more than our power, Todoroki," Izuku says, and his voice breaks and cracks and he's not sure Todoroki can even understand him. His breath hitches, but he doesn't stop. "W-We're more than the people we're related to, m-more than what other people think."

Todoroki takes one step backwards, then another. "Mi--"

"You're not your father," Izuku chokes, chest full of knots. His breath keeps getting stuck on the lump in his throat. "You're not your father, and you're never going to *be* your father."

"You can become a hero."

He thinks of Todoroki's flickering image, of the scars deep in his skin, of the tears on his face, and his resolve is set. The festival doesn't matter anymore. Winning doesn't matter anymore.

The only thing that matters to him, right now…

...Is saving Todoroki.

"The only person who can determine your future is *you!"* Izuku shouts, and he watches as pain and hurt and shock pour over Todoroki's face. "The only person who has any say in who you become is *you!* Not your classmates, not your family, and *especially* not Endeavor!"

"Midoriya--"

"This is *your life,* Todoroki!" Izuku interrupts, because he needs to say this. This could be the one chance he has to do this, to say these words and make sure they're driven home. "Your life, your choices, and *your power!* You said you want to make your father angry!? I can't think of a better way to do it than to use your fire for *yourself!* After all...this is

your power, isn't it!? Your power, *not* his!"

There's a beat.

And Shouto doesn't know why.

But he remembers something.

He remembers something long forgotten, a *good* memory. He and his mother are sitting on the couch, watching TV; All Might is giving a speech about Quirks and how they relate to parents and their children.

"Of course, children are most likely to inherit their Quirks from their parents, but ultimately, it's their choice what they choose to do with that power! It's up to them what kind of person they become!"

And everything clicks. He'd heard Midoriya's words earlier but they hadn't actually struck him until now, until this moment.

He understands, briefly. Maybe just for an instant, but it's there. He gets it.

He *gets it.* He understands what Midoriya has been trying to tell him, and it's a brief moment but he understands.

"Shouto…you can become a hero…without becoming your father."

And then, the flames burst forth.

Izuku's hands go up to shield his face; wind and heat rush at him, pouring over him. The movement of his arms spikes more pain in his bleeding shoulder, but he ignores it.

He lowers his hands again and beholds the spectacle before him.

Todoroki is standing, flames on his left and ice on his right. Beside himself, Izuku smiles, awestruck and victorious.

He's done it. He's freed Todoroki from Endeavor's prison.

From *himself.*

"What the *hell* are you smiling for?"

Izuku snaps out of his thoughts and meets Todoroki's eyes. The anger

and malice is gone, replaced with confusion. And maybe a little bit of relief.

“In this situation, with those injuries...are you *insane?”* Todoroki asks, teeth gritted. “Do you...have some kind of a death wish?”

Izuku’s shaky laugh belies the tears pouring down his cheeks. “W-What kind of question is that?” he asks in lieu of answering, and he plants his palms on the ground and staggers to his feet. He’s dizzy, and the ground seems to swirl beneath him, but he doesn’t back down.

“For what it’s worth, though...” Izuku says, and then, he tosses his head and grins. “...Being a ghost is pretty dang cool.”

Todoroki does something unexpected at that. He smiles, and by the look of it, it’s not something he does often (if at all). The smile looks forced, like he’s trying his best to make it, but that doesn't matter.

“I’ll do it,” Todoroki says, and there’s resolve in his tone as the flames roar around him and ice crackles on his right hand. “I’ll...I’ll become a hero!”

Izuku’s smile grows. “Then let’s *do this,* Thermostat!”

Todoroki swings an arm, and Izuku fires up One For All and *leaps.*

They run at each other, fire and ice versus raw, unbridled power, and Izuku isn’t entirely sure what happens after that. He’s aware of the teachers on the sidelines intervening, aware of cement blasting up between him and Todoroki, but their attacks are too strong. The fire and ice smash into the cement; Izuku’s own attack does the same.

And then, the entire world is lost within a blast of white.

Izuku feels himself flying backwards; his back hits resistance, and he crumples to the ground in a heap. His ribs are burning, and everything hurts something horrible. He can still feel blood soak through his shirt, but he can’t even think about *that.*

Weakly, he laughs. He’s out of bounds, defeated, bleeding, and yet, despite all of that, he finds himself *laughing.*

He was smiling, Izuku thinks, just before passing out. *He was using his left side, and he was smiling.*

Chapter End Notes

THANK YOU ALL SO MUCH FOR ALL YOUR COMMENTS YOU'RE ALL BEAUTIFUL AND I LOVE YOU AND ANYONE WHO TELLS YOU OTHERWISE CAN GET OVER HERE AND *CATCH THESE HANDS!!!* IMMA GO FULL-BLOWN SHIGARAKI ON THEM JUST YOU WATCH.

Seriously tho I love you all. <3 Thank you so much for your continued support!! :D Until next time, go beyond! PLUS ULTRA!!!!!!!!!!!!!

The Other Side

Chapter Summary

"The Other Side" from The Greatest Showman

“Don’t you wanna get away,
From the same old part you gotta play,
‘Cause I got what you need, some come with me and take the ride.
It’ll take you to the other side.”

Chapter Notes

ARRRRRTTTT!!!

irene-draws

fade-from-the-light

insertbnhapunhere

And an edit by sqooboo

THANK YOU ALL SO MUCH!!! :D :D :D :D :D

ALSO, I haven't done this yet before and I feel like a HORRIBLE PERSON but I want to give a huuuuuuge shout-out to ChiwiTheKiwi for helping me beta as of recent! Thanks for your time, dude!

Also, on the subject of ChiwiTheKiwi, he has a really precious one-shot that you just HAVE to read if you're like me and are an absolute sucker for adorable platonic comfort fics. You can read it here and I highly recommend you check it out!! :D

Anyway, enjoy the chapter, and thank you all so much for your support! :D Enjoy the chapter! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He’s surrounded by white.

His body doesn’t feel like his own, and when he opens his eyes, his vision is blurry. There are flowers on a side table, cards; the overhead lights are too bright, far too bright, but he keeps his eyes open

anyway. He hears beeping, steady, and the hum of an oxygen tank. Everything feels distorted and not entirely *real,* like something out of a dream--

Thoughts that aren't his enter his mind.

I did my best. Guess it wasn't enough, though, huh?

It's hard to breathe. Very, very hard to breathe. His vision blurs again, worse this time, but now, something warm and wet rolls down cheeks that aren't his. Tears.

I tried, but, in the end...he was too strong, says the thought process that doesn't belong to him. *I tried. I did my best. Guess...guess it won't be my generation, then. I'll be leaving it to you, girl.*

It's harder to breathe now. Pain spikes through the body that isn't quite his, and his thoughts become less and less coherent by the second. He feels pain, he feels anguish and sorrow and *regret,* but he also feels...hope. It's small. It's miniscule.

But it's there. It's there and it's enough.

Well…

His thoughts--thoughts that don't *quite* belong to him--become even more scrambled and harder to make sense of. His throat gradually closes; his chest is tight; he feels pain, worse than before.

...Go get 'em, Nana.

A suffocating choke. An attempt to breathe. A flatline in his ears.

Then nothing.

The boy awakes in a snap, eyes flying open, body jolting forward on the infirmary bed he's been laid on.

Toshinori reaches out immediately, a hand pressing against Izuku's forehead. "Easy, kiddo, easy," he says, pushing him down. "Don't move, alright? Recovery Girl's trying to figure out how to reset your bones."

For a moment Izuku looks at him, eyes wide and full of panic, of *fear,* and honestly, it shakes Toshinori to the core--but then, Izuku sits back and shuts his eyes, gritting his teeth and breathing sharply between

them.

Toshinori lifts his hand from the kid's forehead and turns toward Recovery Girl. One of Izuku's arms is bandaged to his chest; his shoulder, on his other arm, is wrapped with blood-stained gauze, and all the boy's fingers on that hand are broken--no, actually, they've been broken twice.

"'Reset your bones' is right, good grief." Recovery Girl shakes her head. "You're an idiot, boy, I hope you realize that."

Izuku swallows hard. Sweat beads on his cheeks and forehead and his face has no color whatsoever.

"If you weren't already in so much pain, I'd hit you," Recovery Girl snaps at him, spinnin around the chair to look at Izuku. "But I think you're already stewing in the consequences of your actions, aren't you? This is what you get when you act like a reckless fool."

It sounds harsh but honestly, there is a fine line between being simply reckless and what Izuku did during his fight against Todoroki. Breaking his fingers, one after another and then re-breaking them, breaking his arm, fighting with those injuries--

He's said it before and he'll say it again: Midoriya Izuku is a terrifying force to be reckoned with. To think he'd go this far, to think he'd *do this* to himself in a *school activity*... when he wasn't even *fighting for his life*…

Toshinori doesn't want to think about the lengths someone with that kind of resolve could go. He doesn't want to think about what Izuku is willing to do to himself to achieve his goals.

That fact alone is very, very scary. Terrifying, even.

"Well, good news," Recovery Girl says, hopping off her stool. "I'm knocking you out when I fix your bones. Bad news? I need to perform a surgery to remove the bone fragments from your joints."

Izuku swallows hard, gritting his teeth tighter. "...Yipee."

"Don't you use that tone of voice with me," Recovery Girl snaps at him. "You brought this on yourself. You knew what it would do to you, and you did it anyway. Honestly...this recklessness…"

Izuku doesn't really answer, just grits his teeth a little tighter and

squeezes his eyes shut. Recovery Girl moves aside, fiddling with something on a medical table, and Toshinori stays where he is, seated on a stool by the infirmary bed.

“You really are too reckless,” Toshinori says, and he knows Izuku doesn’t need a lecture but, this has been on his mind ever since the USJ incident. “My boy, you really should--”

“L-Listen,” Izuku chokes between his teeth, and Toshinori stops. “I-I already have seven voices in my head and Recovery Girl yelling at me, I-I really don’t need another one. I get it, believe me, I-I get it. I’m sorry.”

Toshinori feels incredibly guilty at this. He forgets, sometimes, that the boy can hear the voices of the past users in his head.

That the boy can hear Nana in his head.

Izuku swallows hard, squeezes his eyes shut a little tighter. “T-Toshinori-san…”

Toshinori shakes his head. “You really should try and calm down for now,” he says. “Try and calm down, take a few deep breaths, stop talking.”

Izuku opens his eyes, and his gaze is piercing and desperate. “P-Please,” he says, “I-I…” He stops for a moment, grits his teeth and closes his eyes to ride out a wave of pain. And then, breathlessly, with tired, exhausted eyes once again focused on Toshinori: “I-I have to know. It’s...it’s important. Please.”

Toshinori catches Recovery Girl’s eyes for just a moment, and after a second of pondering, she nods, then goes back to preparing the tools for Izuku’s surgery.

“Alright,” Toshinori says, “one question, Izuku.”

“H-How--”

“MIDORIYA!”

“DEKU!”

The door bangs open across the room, and in tumble Kirishima, Iida, Uraraka, and Tsuyu, eyes wide the moment they see their friend.

Izuku opens his eyes again, just a crack, to look at them. “Y-You

guys…”

Howler rushes into the room, and Uraraka lets go of the leash. The dog sprints right up to Izuku’s bedside, whining, nudging Izuku’s forearm with the tip of his nose.

“Everyone, I know you’re worried about your friend, but this is where I kick you out,” Recovery Girl says sternly, but not unkindly. “I need to get him prepped for surgery--”

“SURGERY!?”

“Yes, yes! He’ll be fine, it’s not a big deal, shoo! I’ll be done with him before you know it, just--!”

There are footsteps, followed by the door slamming, and Toshinori turns towards Izuku again. He’s raised his unbroken arm and settled his palm on Howler’s head. He doesn’t stroke the dog’s fur, of course, as his fingers are still broken from the match, but he does let his hand rest on Howler’s head.

“Alright, boy,” Recovery Girl says, crossing towards her table again, “I’m going to put you under in just a moment now. Try and calm down while you can.”

Izuku doesn’t answer. He opens his eyes again (he keeps closing them to ride off waves of pain), and his gaze finds Toshinori’s. His eyes are half-closed, but they carry a certain expression of pain and urgency that Toshinori has never seen before on Izuku’s face.

“C-Can...c-can I ask you to do s-something weird?” Izuku asks, breath hitching. “I-I mean, i-it’s not weird, I-I just…”

“What is it, Izuku?”

“C-Can you...g-ground me?”

Toshinori blinks at him. “Is...is this about that coffee joke? Because as far as I’m concerned, you’re still grounded--”

“N-No, I-I mean…” Izuku swallows hard. “P-Put your hand on my arm, o-or something. K-Keep me...k-keep me *here.”*

...Oh.

“...Ground you in reality, you mean?” Toshinori asks, and Izuku nods.

“I-I know it’s...i-it’s weird,” Izuku says, “a-and I...I-I can’t explain w-why I-I need you to do this right now, but...f-for now, c-could you...please…”

It isn’t so much the request that surprises Toshinori as it is the tone of Izuku’s voice as he says it. He nods, wordlessly, and settles his hand on the boy’s forehead again. Izuku blinks at him, and Toshinori can see a bit of the urgency fade into relief.

Izuku smiles at him, very faintly and very pained. “I’m gonna be feeling this to- *marrow,* haha...haha, to-marrow, heh...haha, *owwww…”*

Toshinori smiles, equally faintly and equally pained. “Hate to break it to you, my boy, but considering what you actually did to yourself, that’s a bit dark.”

“I-It’s okay, you don’t need to break it to me,” Izuku says, and just a bit of the light returns to his eyes. “I do a good job of that myself, don’t you think? Heh...I broke the ice pretty good with Todoroki, too. Got to have a nice conversation with him. Hold on...a n *ice* conversation with him. Heh--” He grits his teeth again.

“Alright, that’s enough, I’m putting you under now,” Recovery Girl says, and she moves toward the bedside with her medical trays. “Once I start the anesthesia, take deep breaths and count to ten, alright?”

Toshinori sees a bit of fear return to Izuku’s eyes, and he doesn’t comment, but he notices the boy’s broken fingers tangle themselves in Howler’s fur, regardless of the pain it brings him.

“O-Okay,” Izuku says, nodding shakily.

Toshinori doesn’t remove his hand from Izuku’s forehead until his eyes slide shut and his breathing evens out.

It’s only now Toshinori realizes that Izuku’s bell is gone.

“I’m leaving him under for now,” Recovery Girl says, tearing open a pack of something and dumping the powder into Izuku’s IV. “He didn’t lose a lot of blood, but still, not to mention his exhaustion…” She nods, as though to reassure himself. “I hate to do this to him, considering it’s the Sports Festival, but...for his own good, I think this is wise.”

Toshinori nods. Izuku's surgery had gone well; he's still out of it, thanks to Recovery Girl, and his arm is in a sling, his wrist and fingers wrapped (individually) with gauze.

"I understand," he says. "And Izuku will hate it, but he'll understand it, too."

Recovery Girl nods solemnly. "He won't miss the entirety of the Sports Festival," she says, "but he'll probably only wake up in time to see the finale. I swear, whoever thought it was a good idea to let this boy have two self-destructive Quirks deserves a huge slap to the face," she says.

(Absentmindedly, Toshinori reaches to touch the spot where Inko had slapped him what felt so long ago. It's hard to believe it'd only been a few weeks…)

"I don't like this," Recovery Girl goes on. "I don't like this one bit. To think he'll do this to himself…that he'd go to such lengths…at the time, the adrenaline was probably blocking out a lot of the pain, but even so. To break one's self like this without holding anything back…that takes an incredible amount of resolve."

"He did it for Todoroki," Toshinori says, and as he says it, it clicks in his mind, too, the fact that Izuku hadn't pushed himself so hard to *win,* but rather, to save his classmate. "Everything you saw, everything Izuku put himself through…he did it to save his friend."

Recovery Girl stares at him, then shakes her head. "You are *not* praising the boy for this," she tells him sternly. "You *can. Not. Praise him for this.* It's already bad enough what he did to himself at the USJ, but this, too…he's going to keep doing it, Toshinori. He's going to keep breaking himself, and he isn't going to stop. Not unless we do something about it."

This is true, Toshinori knows it's true. As the boy sleeps and Howler curls at the foot of the bed, waiting, Toshinori can't help the fear he feels, nor can he shake it.

The boy loves others with his whole heart, but gives his own self little to no regard.

And that is truly terrifying.

Izuku wakes up slowly at first, then all at once. His eyes snap open as

soon as he registers he's awake, and he sits up, a blanket slipping off his chest. His head pounds, and he raises a hand to clutch it, squeezing his eyes shut.

Crap, he thinks, clenching his teeth. *That fight was rough…*

"Good, you're up," comes Recovery Girl's voice, and Izuku opens his eyes just enough to see her. She's fiddling with something on a nearby medical table, not even looking at him; closer, Toshinori is sitting on a stool by Izuku's bed, silent. "Your surgery went well, and there weren't any complications, however…"

Izuku frowns, lowering his hand. He opens his mouth to ask her what she means by "however," but then he realizes.

His right hand is scarred, knuckles slightly crooked and bent. Izuku stares at his hand for a long, long moment--and then, he raises his head to Recovery Girl.

"This is what happens when you abuse your power," Recovery Girl tells him, and she doesn't sound angry anymore, merely...reserved. Distraught, perhaps. "Let that hand be a reminder to you, boy. You can't keep doing this."

Izuku swallows hard.

"...Also, I won't be healing injuries like this from here on," Recovery Girl continues, and both Izuku and Toshinori raise their heads to her. "You heard me, I won't heal self-inflicted injuries like this any longer. You have to find a new way to use your power that isn't so destructive."

Izuku looks down at his hand again and bites his lip.

"She's right," Nana's voice says in his head, and she sounds shaken, too. *"She's right, Izuku."*

Her voice reminds Izuku of the dream he'd had while he was unconscious; a dream, not as haunting or scarring as the one he'd had before, but still equally unsettling.

Death. He'd died in that dream.

The voices in his head go completely silent, and they stay that way, even as he leaves the infirmary with Toshinori and heads down the long hallway towards the stadium.

Silence. Absolute silence.

“You’re quiet, kid,” Toshinori says out of nowhere, and Izuku raises his head to look at him. “Usually, at times like this, you’d be talking up a storm.”

“Ahh, yeah,” Izuku says, shaking his head. He’s limping; he hadn’t noticed before, but he’d broken his leg while running at Todoroki during the final stretch of the fight. “I guess you’re right…”

Toshinori stops altogether at that, and Izuku, confused, stops beside him. “Alright,” Toshinori says, turning towards him fully, “that’s it, what’s wrong with you?”

Izuku blinks. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Izuku, there were *at the very least* half a dozen puns you could’ve made out of what I said,” Toshinori answers. “But you didn’t. So. What’s the matter?”

Izuku bites his lip and turns away, thinking about how he should answer this. He has a lot of things going through his mind right now; ever since his first nightmare, he’s had...so, so very many thoughts, none of which he could really *gather*.

And now he’d just had another strange dream. Another strange dream in another body that wasn’t his own, depicting *death*.

Death.

A person who’d lived, and…

...A person who’d died.

“T-Toshinori-san...how did…” Izuku pauses. He’d wanted to ask this question earlier, but the sudden arrival of his classmates interrupted him, and he hadn’t been able to. He takes in a deep breath, makes sure his eyes are dry, then says in a quiet, reserved voice,

“...How did Nana die?”

Toshinori reels back suddenly, like Izuku had burst into flames unexpectedly. “...Izuku, what…”

“I’m sorry,” Izuku blurts, and his eyes burn even though he doesn’t want them to. The voices in his head are still, silent, and it only makes him feel worse. “I’m sorry, Toshinori-san, b-but...I-I…”

He trails off. A silence forms between them, as does an unspoken wall of tension, and Izuku swallows hard, clenching his teeth behind his lips.

"...My predecessor, Nana Shimura…"

Izuku turns sharply to look at his mentor. Toshinori doesn't look back.

"...She was murdered by the same villain who injured me six years ago."

Izuku sucks in a breath through his teeth. Nana was murdered. Murdered by a single villain. Izuku's first nightmare pops into his head at that moment, and he remembers the fear and desperation and pain he'd felt, and then a sickening severing in his chest, a burning, a *loss--*

"D-Did she...d-did she get a proper burial?" Izuku asks, and his voice is choked and strained, like he'd just been strangled. "D-Did a-anyone...d-did anyone find her body?"

Silence. Within his head, and between him and Toshinori.

And then:

"...There *wasn't* a body."

Izuku inhales sharply, feeling like he'd been stabbed in the chest. The memories of his nightmare rush at him and he's overcome with a sudden realization that, no, it wasn't a nightmare, it was a *memory,* it was a memory that didn't belong to him, a memory he'd relived, *Nana's memory--*

Nana's death.

Her death. Her fear. Her pain. Her desperation. Her mangled, pleading thoughts, the mantra of *I don't want to die, I don't want to die, I don't want to die.*

"Holy…"

"Oh, oh, oh…"

"No…"

"Damn it, damn it, damn it--"

“Does…does that mean…”

“Crap, no…no, dammit, don’t…”

Nana’s voice isn’t amongst the rest of them. She’s the only ex-holder to stay silent right now.

Izuku doesn’t notice his tears until he starts choking on them, until he can’t breathe, until his eyes burn and his throat constricts and he *can’t,* he *can’t,* he just *can’t*--

Toshinori’s arms are around him an instant later, but Izuku barely registers the embrace, feeling numb and not entirely *there.* He feels Howler’s wet nose nudging his hand desperately, but he doesn’t respond even to that.

It clicks. It’s clicked. He knows what that nightmare was now. He knows the pain Nana went through. He knows her desperate train of thought as she was murdered, as she fought for her life, as she *lost*--

--She’d fought so hard and so long but she’d *lost*--

Izuku sobs harder, his one unbroken arm wrapping around Toshinori, fingers balling a handful of the back of his shirt. His forehead presses against Toshinori’s chest, and he feels Toshinori’s arms around his shoulders but he doesn’t feel completely *there.* Usually physical contact is enough to ground him in reality; it’d been enough before, when Recovery Girl put him under for surgery, but now, when he needs it the most--

He can’t ground himself.

All he feels is an overwhelming ocean of pain and hurt and realization, and it’s only made worse when he realizes that his bell choker isn’t around his neck anymore. His chest is tight and his throat is tighter; his sobs are suffocating, emotionally and almost physically, too. He can’t breathe. Everything is too tight and distorted and he *can’t, he can’t, he can’t*--

“Kiddo. Breathe.”

Nana is back. Izuku sucks in a choked breath, but it’s pathetic, and he isn’t sure one could call it a breath at all.

“Breathe. Just…just breathe. Breathe. B-Breathe. Please. I-I’m sorry, I’m sorry, just--just breathe, please, p-please--”

"--reathe, Izuku, breathe."

And Izuku does. He does. He *can.* He sobs harder but he can breathe again. He feels Toshinori's fingers running through his hair, Howler's nose against his hand, arms around his shoulders.

He cries.

And he thinks, briefly, that it's nice to be able to finally cry this out.

"Are you sure you'll be alright?" Toshinori asks him, holding the boy at arms-length and looking into his eyes, tired and red and still wet with tears. "You could go sit somewhere if you don't feel like facing anyone else yet…"

"N-No, I'm fine," Izuku says, wiping his eyes again. His fingers are curled around Howler's leash, and his knuckles are white. "Y-You go. I'll meet up with my friends."

Toshinori isn't so sure he should leave the kid alone, especially after what'd just happened (some kind of panic attack, maybe, though it was hard to tell).

"Besides," Izuku goes on, raising his head, "you're hosting the awards ceremony this year, aren't you?"

Toshinori blinks. "How did you know that?"

"I didn't. But I do now." Izuku smiles, faintly, in his triumph, and Toshinori sighs heavily. This kid, *honestly*…

"You should go," Izuku says, jerking his head further down the corridor. "I'll be fine, I promise. I'm…" He looks down for a moment, and when he raises his head, he's smiling. It's pained, and his eyes are full of hurt, but it's a smile and it's soft. *Real.* "…I'm better now. Thank you."

"…Anytime, kid," Toshinori says, reaching out, hesitating, then ruffling Izuku's hair. "I'll catch up with you later, alright?"

Izuku nods shortly, bows, then leaves with Howler, limping. Toshinori watches until he's out of sight, then turns and continues down the hall. He thinks about Izuku's bell, the fact that the boy doesn't have it when he'd been wearing it before his and Todoroki's fight.

Maybe Toshinori will be able to check the battlefield once the matches

are over, too. He knows how much Izuku's bell means to him…

Toshinori catches something out of the corner of his eye, and immediately, he puts on his "hero" form out of habit.

Endeavor turns the corner a little ways up ahead, and Toshinori--now "All Might,"--watches. The look on the man's face is hard to read, but if Toshinori had to describe it, he'd say it's a combination of pride and contempt.

All Might opens his mouth to greet Endeavor--but then, he remembers.

Don't trust him, Izuku had said, in a low, dangerous kind of voice. *I don't care what you think about him, you can't trust him.*

"…Endeavor," All Might greets, keeping Izuku's words in the forefront of his mind. "What has you in such a good mood?"

He really isn't sure that's how he should be describing the look on Endeavor's face, but he isn't about to comment on the man's scowl, not right now at least.

"Shouto fought well against that Midoriya boy," Endeavor says, striding towards All Might with big steps that would most likely intimidate anyone else (except, perhaps, Izuku). "It seems he will indeed be able to surpass you someday, All Might."

All Might wants to frown, but keeps up his outer smile. He wouldn't stop to consider this if it weren't for Izuku's warning to him, but now, everything seems so much more clear.

So that's what this was about all along. Endeavor is using his son to try and surpass me.

"…I'll have you know," All Might says, "Midoriya is his own person. Comparing him to me isn't fair at any time! We're all individuals with our own strengths and weaknesses, after all."

This is not the right thing to say. Endeavor's scowl deepens, and with a click of his tongue, he turns away sharply.

"Yes, that Midoriya boy had a lot to say about that, too," he says lowly. "The boy needs to learn his place. If he thinks he can speak like that to his superiors, he has another thing coming to him."

All Might wouldn't notice it if Izuku hadn't warned him. He wouldn't

think much of it. But when he thinks about Izuku's eyes, the look on his face as he spat the words *Don't trust him…*

"Is that a threat, Endeavor?" All Might asks, trying to keep his tone light.

Endeavor turns to him again. "No," he says, simply and firmly. "It is not."

All Might can't tell whether or not it's a lie, and that is *most definitely* a problem.

"Midoriya is a fine student and is already well on his way to becoming an outstanding hero," All Might says, taking a step forward to look Endeavor in the eye. "If the boy doesn't trust you, believe you me, there's a reason for it."

Endeavor's eyes narrow. "And what is that supposed to mean?"

"Be careful," All Might says. "Midoriya already doesn't trust you, and when it comes down to it, I can't promise that I won't side with him."

Endeavor clenches his teeth behind his lips for just a moment. "So you'd believe the words of a *child* over the words of the number two hero. If that's true, then you're a fool."

"I have a reason to trust said child," All Might says simply. The, *you've done nothing to gain my trust* goes unspoken, but Endeavor gets the point. He clicks his tongue again, then storms past All Might back down the hall and out of sight.

All Might heads in the opposite direction.

Izuku, my boy…

…You may be right about Endeavor.

He makes a mental note to keep a closer eye on the man.

As soon as Izuku knows he's alone and out of earshot of Toshinori, he stops walking. He stands there for a long moment, staring at the far wall across from him, and even though there are a thousand things racing through his head, he can't make sense of any of it.

He takes a short breath. When he speaks, his voice is hoarse and broken.

"...Nana?"

Silence.

"Please," Izuku says, then bites his lip right afterwards. "...It isn't your fault, you know it isn't. Please...c-come back."

"It hurt you." Nana's voice is oddly reserved, broken. Sad. *Hurt. "Kiddo, you...you saw my* death, *you shouldn't have seen that, you shouldn't have had to go through that, never--"*

"You didn't show it to me," Izuku cuts in, ignoring the memories that pour into his mind. Blood, pain, fear, hurt, desperation, panic-- "You didn't show it to me, Nana, it isn't your fault. Please don't blame yourself for it."

"Kiddo, you were so...you were so scared. *I felt it, I felt how scared and hurt you were, a-and--"*

"Stop it," Izuku chokes, then snaps his teeth together. *"Stop it, Nana."*

More silence.

"...Alright, alright. I won't."

Izuku doesn't believe her. Not for a second.

"Deku, you're back!" Uraraka leaps up from her seat and races towards him, eyes wide. "Recovery Girl said you were in surgery, are you okay?"

"Y-Yeah, I'm fine," Izuku says, hoping his eyes aren't red. He looks over Uraraka's shoulder, towards where she'd been sitting a second ago. "...Where's Iida? Kirishima?"

"Oh, he had to take a phone call," Uraraka answers simply. "He fought Todoroki a little while ago. He got so close, Deku, you should've seen it. But..."

Izuku swallows, then nods. So Iida had lost. It doesn't really surprise Izuku, really, even though a part of him is upset that it doesn't. He raises his head towards the arena, towards the screen displaying the next matches.

"And Kirishima?"

“He fought Bakugou,” Uraraka says. “I went to go see him in the waiting room a little while ago. He was upset, but...he said he’s gonna do even better next time.”

Izuku smiles faintly. That sounds like Kirishima. He nods, and he and Uraraka take their seats in the stand again. The voices in his head are completely silent again, which is...concerning, considering the last time he’d heard them was during his episode (with the exception of Nana, of course). Maybe they’re trying to give him space.

Either way, Izuku puts it out of his thoughts for now. There’s only one match left. The finale.

Todoroki vs. Bakugou.

In the end, Todoroki loses.

The fight is...well...it isn’t much, honestly. Nothing like Izuku’s and Todoroki’s drawn-out battle. The finale match of the Sports Festival ends...unsatisfactorily. And Izuku knows it only makes sense why Todoroki had lost so quickly.

He didn’t use his flames, but that wasn’t why he lost.

He lost because he was conflicted. Because he *is* conflicted. Because, despite the fact that he’d broken free of Endeavor’s chains, the scars are still there, and scars...they don’t fade easily. It takes time. It takes a *long* time. Izuku of all people knows this.

The award ceremony is...kind of painful to watch. Izuku doesn’t pay attention to what’s actually going on, drumming his fingers against his knee impatiently. He watches the award ceremony with his friends, but as soon as it’s over, he turns to Uraraka and Kirishima (Iida hasn’t returned yet), tells them both that he’ll catch up with them later, and leaves as quickly as he can.

He can look for his bell later.

Right now, he has to find Todoroki.

He does find Todoroki. They smash into each other once again when turning a corner, just like they had before. Izuku reels back, clutching his head with his unbroken arm; across from him, Todoroki also rubs his head, his other hand holding his second place medal by the

lanyard.

(He isn't wearing it, Izuku notices.)

"...Sorry," Todoroki says unexpectedly. The look on his face now is completely different than before; rather than anger and malice, Izuku sees...a calm. A peace. Maybe even relief. "...That was my fault, this time."

"I-It's okay," Izuku says, shifting his weight. "A-Actually..."

"I was looking for you."

They say it in unison, accidentally. Izuku's head snaps up to meet Todoroki's eyes, and Todoroki's expression mirrors Izuku's own.

"What?" they say.

A beat.

"You wanted--"

They stop again, staring at each other.

Izuku can't help it; he laughs, shakily, and mostly it's out of embarrassment. "Sorry," he says, "you go first."

Todoroki nods stiffly and reaches into his back pocket. "I found this after our match," he says, pulling his hand out of his pocket and extending it to Izuku. "This is yours, isn't it?"

It's his bell choker. The fabric is wrecked and charred, but the actual bell seems fine. Izuku takes it from Todoroki's hand and closes his fingers around it tightly. He hadn't realized there had been a weight in his chest until he notices it's gone.

"Thank you," he says.

Todoroki nods stiffly. "I...I wanted to say...I'm sorry. For...for being aggressive towards you like I did. Earlier, when I declared war on you...you were going through something, and I didn't even realize it. I'm sorry."

"I-It's okay, you don't have to apologize," Izuku says quickly, stuffing his bell into his pocket; he'll ask Yaoyorozu if she can help him repair it later on, but for now… "You were going through something, too. It's okay."

Todoroki nods again. He seems like a totally different person, now; before, he was cold and stiff and...well... *robotic,* even, but now...Izuku is seeing Todoroki for who he actually is.

Todoroki's spirit is free from Endeavor's chains, and now, he's free to be himself.

"I didn't use my flames against Bakugou," Todoroki says, and Izuku is brought back to the present. "Even after what you did, what you said…"

"It's okay," Izuku cuts in. "I-It...I-It takes time to...to recover from stuff…"

"Stuff," he'd said. It feels like a dumb word to use here, but he can't think of anything else to say.

They stand there in silence for a moment; and then, Howler steps forward, tentatively, and presses his nose against Todoroki's leg.

Todoroki blinks, first at Howler and then at Izuku. Honestly, Howler had been so quiet and Izuku had been in such a rush to get to Todoroki that he'd forgotten the dog was even there...

"...You can pet him," Izuku blurts, without thinking. "I mean, he's not actively doing anything right now, so..."

Todoroki hesitates, and then, he raises his hand and runs his fingers through Howler's fur. The dog nuzzles him again, and Izuku smiles before he can stop himself. Howler has always been good at that, knowing when a person needs comfort. It's a blessing, really.

"...Anyway...Midoriya…"

Izuku waits for him to continue. Todoroki hesitates, fingers still stroking Howler's head softly.

"...I wanted to say, thank you," Todoroki says. "Honestly...now that I think about it, I was...in a bad spot. I was blinded by my hatred and anger, and...and you're the reason I'm now able to see just how far under I was. You're the reason I can start finally moving forward. And…" He pauses. "...I know it...it won't happen…. *quickly,* but...it's happening now because of you. Thank you."

Izuku can't help it. He *beams,* and Todoroki stares at him, like he isn't quite sure what to make of it.

“I’m glad,” Izuku says loosely. It’s easier to talk to Todoroki now, he thinks, and he isn’t sure why. Todoroki nods simply and looks down, shifting his weight awkwardly.

“...Also, for the record, I’m haunting Endeavor.”

Todoroki blinks at him again. “You’re what.”

“Endeavor,” Izuku answers simply. “I’m haunting the living crap out of him.”

Todoroki stares.

And then, he exhales sharply through his nose. He doesn’t smile, he doesn’t laugh, but Izuku can only guess what his spirit is doing.

“...Thank you, Midoriya.”

Izuku smiles again, then nods. “I know we kinda got off on the wrong foot, but...I hope we can be friends from here on, Thermostat.”

Todoroki blinks at him briefly.

And then, he nods.

“...I hope so, too, Midoriya.”

And Izuku isn’t sure why, but he knows they will be.

DELETED SCENE (but still fic-canon):

Shouto walks down the hall, holding his second place metal by the lanyard in one hand. His other hand sways back and forth at his side as he strides.

“Psst, Thermostat.”

Shouto stops, looking around for a moment or two.

“Hey, look.”

Shouto looks up. Midoriya is laying on his stomach across a few lockers lining the wall, and he’s holding a fishing rod.

Shouto frowns at him. “Where did you get that.”

“Details, details,” Midoriya says idly, fiddling with the crank on the

fishing rod.

Shouto blinks. “How did you get up there.”

“I digress, *details.”*

“What are you doing.”

Midoriya lets the fishing hook down further. It’s only now Shouto notices a piece of paper hooked onto it, and on the paper are several numbers, written in blocky print.

Shouto frowns, taking the note. It’s a phone number, assumingly *Midoriya’s* phone number. Shouto directs his frown up at Midoriya, and Midoriya, in turn, beams at him.

“I’m dropping you a line,” Midoriya says.

Shouto blinks.

And then he spins around and keeps walking, ignoring Midoriya’s shout of, “HEY, WAIT, NO, COME BACK! I’VE GOT A BETTER ONE!” as he heads off.

Chapter End Notes

deep breath

I FREAKING LOVE ALL OF YOU GUYS.

:D :D :D :D :D :D :D :D :D :D

THANK YOU FOR ALL YOUR SUPPORT ON THIS STORY WEHKAJSHDKSD I LOVE YOU ALL SO MUCH!!!

:D :D :D :D :D :D :D :D :D :D

Also, things:
-More detail on the "OFA Holder Death Dreams" thing soon.
-Just. More details. In general. Soon.

Until next time, go beyond! PLUS ULTRA!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Satisfied

Chapter Summary

"Satisfied" from Hamilton

“There’s a million things I haven’t done,
But just you wait, just you wait.”

Chapter Notes

ARRRRRRTTTTTTTT

ificouldbringyouback

prophetessofdoom

Also a friend of mine did a Danny Phantom BNHA parody for this fic so check that out too!! :D

Anyway, enjoy the chapter!! :D THANK YOU ALL SO MUCH!!! :D :D :D :D :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Exhaustion from the lingering effects of Recovery Girl’s Quirk coupled with last night’s sleeplessness make it incredibly easy for Izuku to collapse on his bed and shut his eyes, ready to be swept away by sleep. He’s more tired now than he’s ever been; if it weren’t for Howler constantly nudging him awake on the train ride back, Izuku isn’t sure he would’ve made it home at all.

Izuku is *so ready* to just... *sleep.* He lays there, eyes shut, breathing, still in his street clothes and not even caring. The voices of the ex-holders are silent; they probably want Izuku to sleep just as much as Izuku wants to sleep.

He’s close; he feels his consciousness begin to wane, ready to accept the darkness of sleep--

And then, for some reason, a thought strikes him.

Iida.

His eyes snap open, and he sits up. Following the Sports Festival, Iida had kind of...disappeared. The last time Izuku saw him was right

before Izuku's match with Todoroki; after that, though nothing. Izuku can't even remember if he saw Iida at the award ceremony or not.

He reaches over and grabs his phone from the side table, where he'd tossed it before collapsing on his bed. He, Iida, Kirishima, and Uraraka have their own group chat that they'd made shortly after the USJ incident, but Izuku doesn't send a message through that. Rather, he messages Iida directly.

Izuku
Hey, you kinda disappeared earlier.
Are you okay?

Izuku forces himself to stay awake, waiting for a response.

Five minutes pass.

Then ten minutes.

Thirty.

An hour.

Izuku falls asleep with his phone still in his hand.

The Sports Festival was broadcasted everywhere, which meant everyone-- *everyone,* the entirety of Japan--had watched it.

Izuku isn't entirely sure how he feels about that. He lays on his bed, scrolling through the news app on his phone. Howler is curled on the dog bed to his left, not sleeping, just resting, and within Izuku's head, the past holders are giving their own little commentary on the news.

"Hey, look, they're talking about you, sweetheart. …Oh dear."

"'Local Madman Breaks his Bones During the Sports Festival.'"

"What? Where's that? I don't see that."

"I just made that up. See, when I *was your age--"*

"Oh here we go again…"

Nana is silent, though. She's been silent since yesterday, and that doesn't sit well with Izuku at all.

Izuku took his arm out of the sling earlier that morning; it's sore, and he kept it bandaged, but it's better than before. He can deal. Besides, it's only Saturday; he's got today, then tomorrow before school starts back up. He'll be able to heal fully before then.

Izuku sets his phone down beside him, darkening the screen. He stares up at the ceiling for a long moment, fingers laced together and resting over his stomach.

"...Nana?" Izuku calls, softly; the rest of the ex-holders still at once. "You there?"

He knows she's there. She's always there, her and the ex-holders. That wasn't what he meant by the question.

"Yeah, sorry, kiddo, just...thinking."

It's a lie.

"I told you to stop blaming yourself," Izuku says simply. "It's not your fault, you know it isn't."

"...I know."

Izuku swallows, and his chest feels oddly...tight. Usually, when he talks with the ex-holders, he feels warmth, maybe even security. Now, he just feels an unmistakable clench. A tightness that shouldn't be there. A tightness that, perhaps, doesn't belong to him.

He opens his mouth to say something else, but then, beside him, his phone dings. Howler perks up for a second, then settles down once more when Izuku grabs his phone. Izuku feels bandages shift against his shoulder when he moves, where Todoroki's ice had pierced him.

He opens his messenger. The first thing that actually catches his attention is the message he'd sent to Iida last night. It's just his own message, though; there's been no response so far.

It's weird that Iida hasn't responded, Izuku thinks, biting his lip. *I wonder if something happened...*

The new message isn't from Iida, but rather, from Toshinori. With a mental reminder to text Iida again, just in case the first text didn't go through, he taps on his and Toshinori's messages.

Toshinori-san

How ya doing?

His fingers swipe the screen.

Izuku
Good. Sore but good.
You?

Toshinori-san
I'm alright, thanks.
Did you get any sleep?

Izuku
Oh, yeah, I slept like the dead.

Toshinori-san
…

Izuku
:D

Toshinori-san
You're still grounded.

Izuku
D:

Toshinori-san
Don't be like that.
You're dead to me.

Izuku
…

Toshinori-san
:D
In all seriousness, though, if you think you can make it, there's something I'd like to talk with you about.

Izuku
Oh?
What's up?

Toshinori-san
It's about OFA
And Dissociate

Izuku
Sure thing.
When and where?

Toshinori-san
Now, if you can, and at U.A.

Izuku
Okie dokie. Meetcha there!

He's about to darken his screen, and then, at the last second, he remembers. He closes out of his and Toshinori's messages and opens his and Iida's.

Izuku
Did you get my text last night?

Ten minutes pass. Worry begins to leave a bitter taste in his mouth. Iida is kind of infamous to responding to people's texts at unreasonably quick speeds; it's almost as though his Quirk has bled into his texts as well.

But now, there's nothing. There's nothing at all.

"Maybe he left his phone somewhere…?" Izuku thinks out loud, but the idea sounds dumb, even to him. People leave their phones everywhere, sure, but Iida doesn't. There's nothing about Iida's behavior right now that *isn't* worrying.

Izuku is just about to abandon texting and call him instead, but then, his phone dings. A message from Iida. *Finally.*

Iida-kun
Hello, Midoriya. Yes, I did get your message. I forgot to respond. I apologize.

Well. *That* doesn't sound like Iida, either. Izuku bites his lip, and then, he swipes his fingers across the screen and sends his response.

Izuku
You don't have to apologize.
I was just checking up on you.
Like I said, you disappeared right in the middle of the SF.
Is everything ok?

He waits. The response comes much faster this time.

Iida-kun
I'm fine, Midoriya. Thank you.
I have to go. I'll be seeing you Monday.

[IIDA-KUN IS OFFLINE]

Izuku doesn't like it. He doesn't like it at all. It sounds fake. It sounds forced. Plus, the fact that Iida bailed without offering an explanation as to just *why* he left the festival early…

…It doesn't sit well with Izuku at all.

Izuku doesn't know how he does it, but he manages to put it out of his mind. He takes the train to U.A.; he gets recognized by a few strangers who saw him on TV, some pitying and some encouraging, and Izuku smiles and laughs shakily and tries not to Dissociate in front of them.

He gets off the train and runs the rest of the way. Howler is with him, as per usual; for now, Izuku left the dog's vest off, considering they're going out and Izuku isn't planning on Dissociating.

He does wonder, though, what Toshinori wants to talk about.

"I want you to Dissociate," Toshinori says.

Izuku's shoulders slump. Of course. The one time he's sure he won't have to Dissociate. Howler gives him a quizzical look, and Izuku just shrugs it off.

"Kinda sudden," Izuku says instead, raising his head towards his teacher. They're alone, in one of the training forests behind U.A. "What's up?"

Toshinori puts his hands together. "You and I both know how dangerous your Quirk is," he says, "when you use One For All while Dissociating. But it's still a part of your Quirk, and thereby a part of *you.* We need to work on you using One For All as a ghost just as much as we need to work on you using One For All physically, or else…"

Izuku bites his lip. He thinks of Recovery Girl's words, of how dangerous One For All is when combined with Dissociate…but he also thinks of the USJ, how he'd unknowingly summoned the past holders of One For All, and what that would mean for him in a fight if he

could learn to control it.

"...So we're learning both sides of it," Izuku says, and Toshinori nods.

"I spoke with...a friend of mine, recently," Toshinori says, and Izuku doesn't miss his hesitation on the word "friend." "I'll tell you more about him when the time comes, but he's offered to help train you, if you'll accept it."

Izuku blinks. "Seriously?"

"Seriously." Toshinori pauses, just for a moment. "...Has Nana told you anything about him? Mentioned anything at all?"

Izuku shakes his head. He doesn't need to think about it.

"...Well, either way, he's agreed to help teach you to use One For All physically," Toshinori says. "As for One For All *spiritually,* well...we're all in the dark."

"So," Izuku says, "you think it'd be good to...try it?"

"A little bit," Toshinori says quickly. "At this point, you can only use about five percent of One For All without breaking yourself. If you can apply that to using One For All as a ghost, you shouldn't have any problem."

A headache begins to pound at Izuku's temples, and he shakes his head in an attempt to knock it out. It only helps a little. "So, I'll just...um...try…?"

Toshinori nods. He seems very reluctant, maybe even anxious about this, and when Izuku thinks back to what happened at the USJ, he knows it only makes sense why.

"Alright," Izuku says, "so, I'll just--"

Toshinori's eyes widen. "Kid, wait, sit do--"

Izuku dissociates. Howler jumps, startled, when Izuku's body crumples to the ground; but then, a second later, he sits down by it, guarding.

Izuku beams, hovering over the ground nearby. "Good boy!" he says, and Howler perks up immediately, tail swishing back and forth through the grass.

Toshinori puts his head in his hands. "You know, you'd save yourself a

lot of bruises if you sat down before you dropped."

Izuku winces and rubs the back of his neck with a shaky laugh. "Yeah, you're probably right...anyway, I'm going to...y'know...fire up One For All now and see what happens…"

Toshinori stiffens, then nods. "Remember, control. Do your best to control it."

Izuku nods. He supposes a lack of control would end with him summoning all seven past users again, which would lead to…

"You were puking blood."

He shakes his head again. Yeah. He'll have to control it. Maybe, rather than focusing on using *One For All,* he'll focus on summoning one of the users. Something to focus on to help him maintain control.

He shuts his eyes. He feels warmth, which is odd, because he doesn't really *feel* things as a ghost, but it's there. It's warmth, it's familiar. It's One For All.

His feet hit solid ground, and he opens his eyes, looking down at his hands. His figure is outlined by neon green, just like it'd been back at the USJ when he used One For All then.

He raises his head. Toshinori is watching him, looking him in the eyes, which means he's visible. Which means he's using One For All.

But he hasn't summoned anyone. (Yet.) He's still alone aside from Howler watching his body and Toshinori watching him.

"So, this is probably...the bare minimum," Izuku says, looking over himself. "This is, maybe...I don't know. It's like...firing up One For All but not throwing the punch yet."

It's hard to read the look on Toshinori's face, which is odd, because Izuku can usually read the man pretty well.

"I'm gonna try and summon someone," Izuku says firmly, before Toshinori can stop him or talk them both out of it.

There's a long moment. It's...tense, for both of them, considering what'd happened the last time Izuku used this power.

It doesn't stop him, though. Being able to fight like this, being able to call on the past holders…

He shuts his eyes again, enveloped by darkness, and he clenches his fists. The warmth turns into a burn, but it doesn't last for long. He feels a tug at his chest, a pull; he thinks of the name, *Nana Shimura,* and then, he opens his eyes.

She's there.

Nana Shimura.

She isn't distorted, like she was when Izuku summoned her and the others before. Her figure is translucent (he can see the U.A. building through her), but clear. She has black hair done up in a ponytail behind her head--for a second, she reminds Izuku of Yaoyorozu. She's wearing what seems to be her hero costume, considering the flowing cape.

She's staring at Izuku. Her eyes are wide, a little confused, and there are scars on her face, some short, some long; some jagged and others straight; some more prominent than others.

There isn't a warning at all. She lurches forward, and on instinct, Izuku flinches back--but then, her arms go around Izuku's shoulders, tight at first and then even tighter. Izuku freezes, not uncomfortable, but definitely startled. He hadn't expected a hug from her...

"...You don't know how long I've been waiting to do that," Nana whispers, close to his ear.

Izuku's sharp inhale of breath gets stuck on the lump in his throat, but then, his arms go around her, and she tightens the embrace.

Nana Shimura. All Might's predecessor. A person who lived, and…

...A person who died.

Nana pulls away shortly thereafter, though she leaves her hands on Izuku's shoulders for a moment. She smiles, and although he can see pain her eyes, he can tell it's honest.

And then, she turns towards Toshinori, and Izuku follows her gaze. Toshinori is staring at Nana with eyes blown wide with...something. Some kind of overwhelming thing, several emotions mashing together at once.

Nana steps towards him, one foot after the other, and Toshinori stands there, staring, disbelieving. Izuku watches with Howler, waiting,

breath held.

And then Nana hugs Toshinori, too.

He'd thought she was gone.

He'd heard it from Gran, heard it on the news. Seen footage. No one was there for the fight but people were there for the aftermath. There wasn't a body, but there was blood. There was blood everywhere, splattered on the sides of buildings and along the cracked asphalt, along with torn clothes and a bloodied cape that could only belong to one person.

Nana Shimura was dead. She'd been murdered. And Toshinori had never gotten the chance to say goodbye.

But she's here. She's here now, as a ghost but it's still unmistakably her--the smile she'd encouraged him with, arms around his shoulders, and she's a ghost but she's real, this is *her*.

"...I missed ya, kiddo," she says, faintly, just loud enough for Toshinori to hear.

And it takes all of Toshinori's willpower not to break down then and there.

Izuku doesn't really know how it happens, but somehow, the three of them end up lying on the grass, staring up at the bright sky. A breeze rolls through the grass, shimmering in the sunlight; Howler, at Izuku's command, left Izuku's physical body and came to curl at his ghost-self's side, and Izuku runs his fingers through the dog's fur absentmindedly.

"You're both too reckless for your own good," Nana says simply; she's laying in the grass on Izuku's left, and Toshinori is laying in the grass on her left. "Honestly. I get that all of us One For All holders are reckless *someway* or another, but you two take the cake. No contest."

Izuku smiles, faintly, and hopes it doesn't look like a wince. This calm is...nice, he thinks, but at the same time…

...He wants to know what happened. He wants to know what *really happened* to Nana, how she was killed, and moreover, who killed her. Toshinori had mentioned it being the same villain who injured him six

years ago--an injury that nearly costed the hero his life--and Izuku wants to know *who that villain is.*

Seeing Nana, seeing her scars, reliving her *death*... he wants to know.

“You wanna ask something, Izuku?” Nana’s voice brings him back to the present, and he turns to her. She looks back at him, simply, but sternly, too, and he’s reminded yet again that she can feel his emotions.

Izuku opens his mouth to say “yes,” but what comes out is, “No, it’s fine. We can talk about it some other time,” and then he goes back to staring up at the sky.

He wants to ask about it, he really, really does.

But at the same time, right now, this peace is nice, too.

Eventually, though, Nana sits up, and soon after, so do Izuku and Toshinori on either side of her. “Speaking of reckless,” Nana says, to Izuku, “I’ve been here for a while. You should probably shut off One For All and give yourself a break, kiddo.”

Izuku blanches, just a little bit. He doesn’t feel exhaustion or pain as a ghost, so it’s easy to forget sometimes that, at his roots, he is still a human being with limitations.

“That’s right,” Toshinori says, and he rises to his feet, as do Nana and Izuku shortly thereafter. “We’re still testing the waters when it comes to your Quirk, Izuku.”

Izuku nods. He supposes Toshinori is still in shock about all of this, seeing his predecessor after she’s been dead for so long. The man hasn’t had much to say since Izuku summoned her.

Toshinori turns to her, and Izuku can see the pain in his eyes. “Nana--”

“Don’t say goodbye,” Nana says, beaming at him. She raises a fist and gently knocks Toshinori in the chest, right over his heart. “I’m in here, metaphorically, and…” She raises her other fist and knocks Izuku in the chest with it. “...Here, literally. I’ll see you around.”

She loops one arm around Toshinori’s shoulders, and the other around Izuku’s. “Try not to be so damn reckless in the future, alright?” she says, sternly, but not without mirth.

Izuku beams and laughs, and when he glances over, he sees Toshinori smile, too.

Izuku doesn't want to, but he releases his hold on One For All after that, and Nana disappears into the air, leaving him and Toshinori behind.

Izuku's eyes snap open, and he looks up at the sky, back in his own body where he belongs. He has a horrible headache, and his stomach burns, but it's nothing like the pain he'd felt re-entering his body at the USJ, which he takes as an improvement.

A hand is held out to him. "You feelin' alright, kiddo?"

Izuku blinks. His vision is a little blurry. He accepts Toshinori's hand and lets the man pull him to his feet; he stumbles, just for a second, but doesn't fall.

"Yeah, I'm alright," Izuku says, beaming. "That was...that was something else. Nana…"

Toshinori looks down for a moment, then nods. "It's...a bit hard to believe, if I'm honest."

Izuku smiles a little brighter. "I'm glad, though," he says, and he thinks about his dream, about Nana's desperation to say goodbye. He keeps up the smile, though it's a bit softer now than before. "...I'm really glad."

Toshinori nods again, stiffly. "Well...Nana was right, Izuku. I think the two of us are both a little too reckless for our own goods. I suppose Recovery Girl has a right to be mad at us sometimes…"

"She's *always* mad at you, though," Izuku says, grinning, and before Toshinori can respond, Izuku takes off running. "Maybe you *needle-ittle* reminder!"

"That was *desperate!"* Toshinori hollers after him, and Izuku cackles. It's nice to be able to laugh freely again.

Toshinori sighs, watching Izuku's retreating back. He turns to Howler, sitting at his side. "I don't imagine you'll vouch for me, would you?"

Howler takes off after Izuku.

"...Yeah I didn't think so."

Toshinori is glad, though. It's nice to hear Izuku laugh again.

Even though Izuku leaves U.A. feeling lighter than he'd felt going in, a lot of things run through his mind as he heads home. He thinks about Nana and Toshinori, about Nana's death, and then about Nana's predecessor's death, which Izuku had seen following his and Todoroki's match at the Sports Festival.

Two deaths, back-to-back. Nana, Nana's predecessor.

He's seen them both so far.

"What are you thinking about, boyo?"

"Nothing," Izuku lies, continuing home with Howler at his side. "Just, y'know...thinking."

"Pfft. That's just a fancy way of saying ya don't wanna tell us what you're thinkin'. Which is fine, you don't have to tell us anything, but seriously. It's alright to not wanna talk, y'know?"

Izuku clenches his jaw. "...Sure."

"Heya, buddy, that reminds me." It's the voice of the youngest-sounding user again; Izuku hasn't had the chance yet to ask his age, despite his curiosity. *"That Todoroki kid, do you know how he's doing?"*

"Well, I mean, I saw him yesterday," Izuku says, pausing. He thinks about Nana again, what her pain felt like, the scars on her spirit…

Todoroki has more.

Somehow or another, for that brief moment Izuku had seen Todoroki's spirit, comparing that to Nana's…

Todoroki has more emotional scars than a woman who was brutally murdered.

Izuku doesn't really think about it. He stops in the middle of the sidewalk and pulls out his phone, finding Todoroki's number a second later (he'd managed to get it after chasing Todoroki down following the whole "dropping you a line" incident). His fingers fly across the screen, and he sends his message a second later.

Izuku
What's up?

He waits.

Thermostat
Oh. I forgot you had my number.

Izuku
:'(
You wound me.

Thermostat
I have no idea how to respond to that.

Izuku
Anyway, how are you?
How are things at home?

Thermostat
Things are…oddly calm.
It's strange.
I was expecting my father to blow up at me for placing second in the festival, but…
He's been quiet since yesterday.

Izuku
Oh?

Thermostat
Yeah.
…
Wait.
Midoriya what did you do.

Izuku
I didn't do anything, I promise.
I haven't even haunted him yet.

Thermostat
"Yet."
Why is that there.

Izuku
¯_(ツ)_/¯

Thermostat
Why is that there.

Izuku
Your father sucks I'mma haunt him.
:D

Thermostat
Midoriya no

Izuku
Midoriya yes.

Thermostat
Midoriya

Izuku
I already told you I was gonna haunt him.
Don't you remember?

Thermostat
I thought you were joking.

Izuku
When do I joke?

Thermostat
…

Izuku
Okay fair, seriously though.
Y'know what?
Gimme your address.
I'll haunt him later on tonight.

Thermostat
…
[attachment.maps]

Izuku
AWESOME SAUCE

Thermostat
…

Izuku

[THERMOSTAT IS OFFLINE]

Enji can't stop thinking about what All Might told him yesterday.

He thinks about it all day, even after the Sports Festival is over, even as he burns Shouto's second place medal (second place--Endeavor will never allow his son to be proud of second place), even as he goes to bed.

All Might knows something. Enji doesn't know *how* he knows something, but he does. He'll have to tread lightly, then. He'll have to be careful from this point on. He'll have to watch his back--

His bedroom window flies open.

Enji's eyes snap open, and he sits up in bed, turning towards the window. It's cold outside; the open air brings a chill to his bones, despite his Quirk, and Enji stands up, grumbling under his breath, and shuts the window.

He returns to bed shortly thereafter, laying down again, wondering how the hell the window had blown open--

It blows open again. Enji stares at it for a long moment--and then, he gets up again, shuts it, and returns to bed.

The window flies open once more.

Enji gets up, shuts it, and stares at it, arms crossed over his chest. There's a long beat, a long moment.

And then the window blows open.

He shuts it.

It blows open again.

He shuts it, but this time, he locks it shut with a latch. Satisfied when it doesn't blow open immediately, he turns his back and heads to bed again. Damn wind--

An icy breeze hits him from behind, and he spins around again. The window is wide open, but this time, there is a smiley face drawn on the window, a simple two dots and a curved smile.

It seems innocent enough, by itself.

Enji moves towards it to investigate. He runs his thumb across the smiley face, trying to wipe it off. It doesn't come off. It's permanent marker, then, no doubt. Fresh, judging by the fact he can still smell it.

"What the hell?" Enji says out loud, and he looks around. "If you're some kid fooling around, cut it out. It isn't funny."

Behind him, he hears a paper rustle, and he turns again. There's a piece of paper on the floor, words scrawled in black, smelly permanent marker.

Enji steps towards it, picks it up off the floor, and reads.

thE DeAd hAvE nO reAsoN tO FeAr tHE LivING

aND I aM A GhOsT

The window slams behind him, and Endeavor turns.

The smiley face now has angry eyebrows.

Chapter End Notes

Find me on tumblr! :D <3

That moment when you realize that, including your transcribing job, you just wrote 10k words again today.

...

I should probably take more breaks. XD

Anyway, thank you all sO STINKIN MUCH FOR YOUR CONTINUED LOVE AND SUPPORT OKAY I WOULD BE NOWHERE WITHOUT ALL OF YOU SO THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU I LOVE YOU ALL SO MUCH!!!! :D

Until next time, go beyond! PLUS ULTRA!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Anybody Have a Map?

Chapter Summary

"Anybody Have a Map?" from Dear Evan Hansen

“Does anybody have a map?
Anybody maybe happen to know how the hell to do this?
I don’t know if you can tell, but this is me just pretending to know.
So where’s the map? I need a clue,
‘Cause the scary truth is, I’m flying blind,
And I’m making this up as I go.”

Chapter Notes

ART!!!!!

dorianelle

iamlikecain

THANK YOU SO MUCH!!!!! :D :D :D :D :D :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku sits at his desk that same Saturday evening, fiddling, bell jingling cheerfully every now and then. At long last, he sits back, raising his finished work: he’s attached his bell to a new, black, leather choker necklace (courtesy of his mother, who let him borrow one of hers). He settles it around his neck and clips it behind him on the first try. It’s a perfect fit.

“Nice,” he says to himself, beaming. It’s nice to have his necklace back, he thinks; he isn’t mad at Todoroki for accidentally, well, destroying the necklace part of it, but he’d missed it. It’s a reminder of the friends he’d made since starting school at U.A., and that reminder is always nice.

“The bell is back, whoop whoop.”

“Nice, kiddo.”

“You look great, sweetie.”

“Thanks,” Izuku says, smiling; he spins around in the office chair and bounces to his feet, feeling a little proud of himself. Haunting Endeavor had been...fun. And honestly, he isn’t ashamed to admit it. Maybe it’ll act as a sort-of warning to him.

He snatches his phone off the table, then flops back-first onto his bed, holding the phone at arms-length above his face. He opens his browser and scrolls through the news, like he always does before bed. There’s all the usual reports on the Sports Festival, paying special attention to Bakugou and Todoroki’s final match.

There are a couple articles on Izuku, too, specifically headlines like “U.A.’S TOP STUDENT: SELF-DESTRUCTIVE QUIRK!?” or “BLOW US ALL AWAY: MIDORIYA IZUKU, FIRST IN U.A.’S ENTRANCE EXAM, MAKES AN INFAMOUS NAME FOR HIMSELF AT THE SPORTS FESTIVAL.”

Meh.

Meeeeeeeeh.

He refreshes the page out of habit and almost closes out of it.

But then, a new article pops up. He catches a keyword, and immediately, his eyes widen, and his train of thought comes to a screeching halt.

Ingenium.

The full headline reads: “THE HERO INGENIUM: ATTACKED AND MAIMED BY THE INFAMOUS HERO KILLER, STAIN.”

Izuku’s heart soars into his throat.

It clicks.

My boy hurts a lot.

He hurts a lot and he tries not to let the hurt show because he doesn’t want the people he cares about hurt. But he hurts himself more that way. He keeps it secret from them, keeps it inside of him instead of telling people.

My boy hurts a lot. But he also loves a lot. He loves the people he meets and he wants to make sure they don’t feel the same hurt that he does, because he loves them. He loves them and when they hurt it hurts him more, but that isn’t why he tries to help them. He helps them because he

loves them. He doesn't think about himself.

He calls his friend. He's worried. I sit and wait, and I watch and I listen and I feel. My boy is worried. He is hurt. He's been hurting ever since I got him.

He hurts because he loves too much, but he doesn't stop loving. He keeps loving anyway. My boy is full of hurt but he's also full of so much love. He wants the people he loves to be happy.

My boy goes tense. "Iida?" *he says, and I can hear his voice crack. It sounds wrong. My boy hurts a lot, but he's scared right now, not hurt.* "Iida? Are you okay?"

I can't hear it very well, but I can hear it enough. My boy's friend responds through the box.

"I'm alright, Midoriya. You don't have to worry about me."

My boy shakes his head back and forth. "Iida, please," *he says.* "I saw the news. I know what happened to your older brother. There's no way you're alright right now."

My boy is right. I know he is right because he knows his friends. He knows the people he loves better than anyone.

"...I'll...I'll admit, it hasn't been...easy," my boy's friend says, "but I'm alright, Midoriya, I promise. My family and I...we just need some time."

My boy does not believe him. I can tell he doesn't believe him. I can feel his worry, and he worries and hurts because he loves too much, he holds onto the people he meets because he doesn't want them to hurt, because he doesn't have anyone else.

But my boy does not argue. Instead, he nods, even though he does not believe his friend.

"Are you coming to school on Monday?" *my boy asks, and he sits on the edge of his bed.* "Do you guys, I mean...I could run errands, if you need anything...is Tensei still in the hospital?"

There's a little while of silence.

"Yes, he is," my boy's friend answers. "And we're doing alright. Thank you for offering. I'll see you this Monday."

My boy nods stiffly. "I'll be seeing you," *he says.* "Let me know if

there's anything I can do. And, Iida...if you need someone to talk to...I'm always here, okay? Don't forget that."

There isn't a response, and my boy pulls the box away from his ear. My boy's friend does not come back.

I don't know what to do, so I press my nose against my boy's leg. He jumps, but then, he reaches down and pets me, fingers shaking.

My boy hurts a lot. He hurts because he loves and the people he love hurt, too, and that hurts him more. He hurts because he sees things when he sleeps. He hurts because he won't share this with others.

But he keeps loving anyway. My boy is strong. He is a good boy.

While he's busy loving his friends, I will love him. He does not love himself very much at all.

Izuku doesn't know what to do. He'd been at such a loss for words when talking with Iida, and now... *now*... he just...he feels so empty. Howler is a comforting weight against his leg, and Izuku runs his fingers through the dog's fur, but honestly, Izuku has no idea what to do. He'd had no idea what to do when talking to Iida, either.

"You did the right thing, calling him," says the youngest ex-holder in Izuku's head, and Izuku jumps. He's gotten better at it, but he still forgets they're there sometimes. *"I'm sure just you calling him went a long way."*

"You bet it did. It's really important to know you're not alone when you're going through hardships, especially when it comes to stuff like this."

"It felt so worthless," Izuku says, fingers tightening around his phone. "The words I said, I mean...they didn't *help him* at all…"

"You don't know that," Nana says. *"You don't know they didn't help him. Just hearing a friendly voice, knowing he's not alone...it goes a long way, believe me."*

Izuku swallows thickly, but nods. These people inside of him would probably know this better than anyone; after all, they'd all *died,* mostly in gruesome ways, going by what Izuku has seen thus far.

He stares down at his phone. Now that Iida's call isn't taking up his screen anymore, he sees the news article once again. Ingenium,

attacked, hospitalized. Alive, but barely. More to be reported soon. Hero Killer Stain's whereabouts, unknown.

Izuku pauses for a long moment, thinking.

And then, he gets an idea.

He pulls open his messenger again, closing out of his and Todoroki's texts and tapping his, Iida's, Kirishima's, and Uraraka's group chat. After little to no hesitation, he adds Todoroki's number there, too, then sends a group message to the four of them.

He resolves to do whatever he can to keep this conversation lighthearted and cheerful, despite the circumstances. If Iida doesn't want to talk about what happened, well, Izuku won't talk about it. He'll do whatever he can to keep Iida's mind off what happened to his brother.

[HAS SOME KIND OF BROKEN BONE, PROBABLY has added TODOROKI SHOUTO to chatroom "INSERT CLEVER TITLE HERE"]

[Has Some Kind of Broken Bone, Probably]
Hey you guys do you wanna come over to my house and hang out sometime?
Maybe after all the Sports Festival hype winds down?

[The Rock]
Hey that sounds awesome! :D
I don't have see why not!

[Gravity Falls]
That sounds like fun!! What day did you have in mind?

[Iida Tenya]
Not right now.
Some other time, possibly.

[Has Some Kind of Broken Bone, Probably]
That's fine, Iida. No worries.

[Todoroki Shouto]
Why am I here again.

[Has Some Kind of Broken Bone, Probably]
Because I added you here, obviously.

[The Rock]
Also Midoriya not gonna lie your nickname is kind of a pain to look at hekrjhsdkjf.

[Has Some Kind of Broken Bone, Probably]
Oh, yeah, you're right. Hold on a second.

["HAS SOME KIND OF BROKEN BONE, PROBABLY" has changed their nickname to "UPDOG."]

[The Rock]
What.

[Gravity Falls]
? ? ? ? ?

[Todoroki Shouto]
I'm confused.
What's "updog"?

[Updog]
Nothin', what's up with you? ;)

[Todoroki Shouto]
…

[Gravity Falls]
PFFFFT

[The Rock]
Oh shnap.

[Updog]
Also, before I forget:

[UPDOG has changed TODOROKI SHOUTO's nickname to "THERMOSTAT"]

[Updog]
There :D

[Thermostat]
…

[THERMOSTAT has changed UPDOG's nickname to "SPEARMINT"]

[The Rock]
Oh shnap.

[Gravity Falls]
Pfft oh my *gosh* Deku. XD

[Spearmint]
EHRJESRKHSJFDF.
TODOROKI W H Y.

[Thermostat]
You. Literally call me Thermostat.
You have no right to get upset with me for this.
Also, have you seen your hair?

[Spearmint]
HERJHSKDJFSDF.
FREAKING.
***SPEARMINT*.**

[The Rock]
Spearmint.

[Gravity Falls]
Spearmint.

[Iida Tenya]
Spearmint.

[Spearmint]
HEJKRHSKFDF.
Well…
I guess it is fun to *e-spearmint* with other nicknames sometimes.

[Thermostat]
…

[The Rock]
…

[Gravity Falls]
…

[Iida Tenya]

…
Why are you like this. Who hurt you.

He's still interacting with us, Izuku thinks, smiling faintly.

[Spearmint]
That's, like, the greatest compliment you can get from a pun tbh.
A testa-mint of my success. :D

[Thermostat]
I digress. Why am I here again.

[Gravity Falls]
Anyway, Deku, you were talking about us coming over?
We should definitely plan a day!! It'd be great to hang out sometime! :D

[Spearmint]
Oh yeah, right! Okay, well, weekends work well for me.
What are you guys doing next Saturday?
Or should we wait until the week after so the Sports Festival kinda blows over?

[Thermostat]
Week after.

[Iida Tenya]
Week after.

[The Rock]
^^^^

[Gravity Falls]
^^^^^

[Spearmint]
Alright, sounds like a plan! :D
I'll text you guys again a little closer to that day.
Thanks!!

[SPEARMINT IS OFFLINE]

Izuku sets his phone off to the side and flops backwards onto his bed,

letting out a long, heaving sigh.

It isn't much, and it's not as much as he wishes he could do. He wants to do more, say more, *be* more.

But for now, this is it. He isn't okay with it, but it's all he can offer right now.

Izuku heads to school Monday morning with Howler, the dog's vest strapped over his chest and back. Absentmindedly, Izuku scrolls through the news on his phone as he rides the train; there are more reports on Ingenium, but not many, and Izuku scrolls past them all pretty quick. He isn't in the mood to relive any of that, or think of the pain Iida must be feeling.

He gets off the train (after being recognized, again, by a few strangers who'd watched the Sports Festival), flips his umbrella over his head, and hurries down the sidewalks, towards U.A., ignoring the sound of rain dripping around him and against the umbrella.

I wonder how Iida's doing, Izuku thinks, hurrying along with Howler prancing by his side. *He hasn't texted since Saturday...I wonder how Ingenium is…*

Something slams into him suddenly--just, *slams into him* from behind, and Izuku is knocked forward, stumbling and tripping before ultimately crashing to the ground. Howler is by him immediately, nuzzling his face, and Izuku shakes his head to knock away the dizziness, then looks up.

Across from him, also on the ground, is Iida.

"Iida!" Izuku says, grinning, and he snatches his umbrella off the ground and bounces to his feet, extending a hand to Iida. "Sorry, my bad!"

Iida doesn't accept his hand, merely gets to his feet on his own. "'Your bad'?" Iida asks, frowning. "I was the one who rammed into you. I apologize."

"Nah, it's fine," Izuku says, rubbing the back of his neck awkwardly with his rejected hand. "I've been accidentally rammed into a lot, it's no big deal."

He pauses for a moment, lowering his hand back to his side. He and

Iida stand across from each other for a long second or so; a second with a tangible, awkward silence between them.

“We should get going,” Iida says, breaking the silence just as Izuku opened his mouth to say the same thing. “We’re going to be late for school.”

“R-Right,” Izuku says, nodding, and he and his friend continue down the sidewalk, flanking each other. Izuku looks down at the wet sidewalk as they go, his shoes suddenly becoming very interesting.

“...So, Iida,” Izuku says, glancing at him, “how’s, I mean...how’s your brother?”

Iida tenses, just slightly, and someone who’d known him less wouldn’t have noticed anything. “He’s still in the hospital,” Iida says, “but he’s alive, and his life isn’t in danger anymore.”

Izuku nods, drinking this in. “...And...how are you?”

Iida stiffens again. There’s a long, painstaking moment in between Izuku’s question and his answer; Izuku notices Howler nudge Iida’s hand with his nose, but Iida doesn’t react to it at all. The rain picks up suddenly, and a roll of thunder cuts the silence.

“...We should hurry,” Iida says, and he does just that, picking up his pace until Izuku is struggling to keep up with him. Izuku seriously dislikes the fact that Iida hadn’t answered his question.

They take their seats in Class 1-A amongst the rest of the students. Howler immediately lays under the desk at Izuku’s feet, like he’s been taught to do, and Izuku slips his backpack over his shoulder and sets it on the desk. Around him, his classmates are chatting about the Sports Festival excitedly, although Izuku tunes it out for the most part.

“Hey, Midoriya!”

Izuku lifts his head. Kirishima grins at him. “How about you, huh? Did you get recognized on the way here, too, or did the lack of presence thing come to bite you in the butt?”

“Well,” Izuku says, “it always comes to bite me in the butt, but yeah. Most of them didn’t recognize me until after they’d elbowed me in the face or something.”

“Nice,” Kirishima says, and he winces. “Now that you mention it, that’s kinda how we met, too, right? I rammed ya in the back of the head.”

Izuku remembers that. It seems so long ago…

The classroom’s door opens, and in steps Aizawa, the bandages finally gone from his face, revealing several scars. The students scramble into their seats as soon as they see him, and by the time Aizawa makes it to the desk, everyone is at their assigned desk, silent.

Hagakure breaks the silence. “Sensei, your bandages are gone!”

“Yes,” Aizawa says, touching one of the scars on his face absentmindedly. “How wonderfully observant of you. Now,” He raises his head towards the class, and Hagakure takes her seat again, “today’s homeroom will be focused on Hero Informatics.”

The temperature in the room seemed to drop below freezing point.

“Please don’t be a pop quiz, please don’t be a pop quiz, please don’t be a pop quiz,” Kaminari chanted a little ways off, and Izuku frowned at him, leaning over towards his desk.

“It isn’t that bad,” Izuku hisses quietly.

“Easy for *you* to say,” Kaminari hisses back. “You study heroes and stuff for *fun.”*

“This isn’t a pop quiz,” Aizawa says simply, and half the room lets out a collective sigh of relief. “Due to the pro-hero draft picks from this year’s Sports Festival, today you will be choosing your hero codenames.”

A beat of silence.

And then, the classroom riots, like Izuku’s been expecting. Everyone is talking and shouting at once, cheering, suddenly more excited than before. Howler’s head snaps up, and he looks at Izuku quizzically, to which Izuku shrugs and shakes his head.

Hero names. He’d thought of a few, when he was younger, but…

The classroom calms at once when Aizawa’s eyes flash red for a brief moment; and then, Aizawa snatches the remote off the desk and presses a button. A screen drops in front of the blackboard behind

him.

“Like I said, this has to do with the pro-hero draft picks,” Aizawa says simply. “From this year’s Sports Festival, here are the results.”

He presses another button. Names and numbers flash all over the screen. Bakugou and Todoroki are, of course, at the very top; a little further down, though, to his own surprise, Izuku finds his own name.

I got drafted? Izuku thinks, tilting his head one way in confusion. *Huh. Wasn’t expecting that. And a couple hundred drafts, too…must be because I came first in the entrance exam. It definitely isn’t because of the one-on-one matches, that’s for sure…*

“Regarding the internships,” Aizawa says, “you will all be participating regardless of whether you received any offers. Those of you who *did* receive offers will choose from agencies who drafted you, and those of you who did *not* receive offers will choose from a list of agencies accepting interns.”

Izuku and his classmates nod. *I wonder if one of my drafts is from that “friend” Toshinori-san mentioned before,* he thinks to himself. *The one said he’d help me with One For All…*

“I wonder if Gran drafted you,” Nana’s voice in his head says, unknowingly repeating exactly what he’d thought.

“Gran?” Izuku repeats, in a whisper.

“Yeah, Gran Torino,” Nana answers.

“Oh, that *old nutjob?”*

“I can’t wait *to see how this encounter goes, it’s gonna be great.”*

“Oh dear…”

Izuku bites his lip. “Um…”

“Don’t worry, kiddo, Gran’s gonna love ya,” Nana says, and Izuku can hear the smile in her voice and knows she isn’t lying. *“The two of you have, ahh…similar senses of humor, too. You’ll get along well.”*

Izuku is about to ask just what she means by that, but Aizawa’s voice brings him back to the present.

“Regarding your hero names,” Aizawa says, “you’re all still first years,

which means you'll have time to change them before you graduate, but remember, a lot of times, the names you pick now will stick, so choose wisely."

Izuku frowns. *No pressure or anything, right?*

"That goes for your interns as well," Aizawa goes on. "There are still some third years who regret the agency they picked for their internship. Choose wisely and have no regrets."

Izuku smiles, silently dying on the inside.

DEFINITELY NO PRESSURE, RIGHT.

"Anyway, I'm unsuited to help you pick your nicknames," says Aizawa, "so, the person helping you with that in my stead is--"

The door bangs the wall, and all heads whip around in that direction. "ME!" Midnight declares proudly, stepping into the room like she owns the place. Aizawa moves off to the side with his sleeping bag *(He bailed on us,* Izuku thinks), and Midnight takes his place at the front of the classroom.

She grins fiendishly. "Let's get started, shall we?"

Shortly afterwards, wipe-off canvases are passed around the room, one to each student, along with a black marker. Midnight continues observing the room, that same grin on her face, and Izuku snaps his head down at his canvas every time he meets her gaze, not wanting to be caught under it for too long.

"Alright, then," Midnight says, grinning, "when you think you're ready, you'll write your name on the board and present it here, in front of the entire class." At this, she steps aside, gesturing to behind the desk beside her.

The mood plummets.

"Wait," Kaminari says, pen going still on the canvas. "We're...presenting these? In front of the entire class?"

Midnight nods enthusiastically. "I mean," she says, turning to face him, "if you can't be proud of your name amongst your peers, how on earth can you be proud of it when you get into the hero world, hmm? How can you be proud of it and display it for the entire world to see?"

The entire world…

Izuku swallows hard.

No pressure though, right?

Freaking.

No pressure.

“So,” Midnight says, swinging an arm out to the class dramatically, “who wants to go first?”

Izuku stiffens.

FREAKING.

NO PRESSURE.

“I will go!” Aoyama says, raising his hand and from his seat in the same movement, holding the canvas in the opposite arm. He moves from his desk to the front of the room; Izuku and his classmates watch him, breath held.

This is gonna set the mood for the rest of us, Izuku thinks, biting his lip. *Let’s just hope it isn’t something weird. Everyone’s already on edge here, we don’t want to ruin the mood--*

Aoyama flips around his canvas and holds it above his head.

“The Shining Hero: I cannot stop twinkling!” he announces proudly.

Izuku has half a mind to bang his head on his desk.

AND THERE GOES THE FREAKING MOOD.

Thank goodness for Tsuyu, honestly. She’s the one who got everyone back on track with her own adorable, fitting hero name, “Froppy.” The first couple names were weird and it kind of took the seriousness out of the whole thing, but thanks to Tsuyu, they’re back on track.

One by one, everyone gets up and delivers their hero names. Izuku sits back for a while, contemplating, tapping his marker against his chin absentmindedly, staring at the blank canvas.

He’d had a few names in mind, ever since he was younger, but...now

that he's actually here, now that the time has come…

"Hey," Izuku says, quietly, so just the voices within him can hear, "what were your hero names?"

"Ahh, I was hoping you'd ask that, boyo. Mine was 'Boiling Point.'"

"Oooo, that's pretty neat."

"Well, at least, I think it was 'Boiling Point.'"

"Oh dear."

"Ummmm…" It's the younger one again, the youngest user in Izuku's head. *"I never got the chance to, y'know, actually decide on an official hero name."*

Izuku's train of thought screeches to a standstill. "Wh--"

"Midoriya!"

Izuku's head snaps up, and his knees smack the bottom of his desk when he jumps a little too abruptly. Midnight doesn't seem to notice she'd startled him, because her grin doesn't waver.

"You ready?" she asks.

Izuku, numbly, takes up his canvas and pen. "Y-Yeah, I think I'm ready."

On stiff legs, he makes his way to the front of the room. It's easier, he thinks, facing his classmates now than it'd been before when he'd just started as a student here.

It occurs to him once he's at the front of the classroom that he didn't actually write anything on his canvas. With a start, he pops the cap off the pen and scribbles down the name he's had on his mind; a name he'd picked at the last second, but seems all too...perfect.

He raises his head to the class, sets the marker down on the desk, and flips around the canvas.

The Phantom Hero: Deku

His classmates blink. He hears a couple gasps of shock.

"I get the 'Phantom' part," Kirishima says, frowning, "but, I mean...are

you sure you're okay with that being your hero name?"

Izuku swallows, then nods. "I'm not gonna lie, I hated it," he says. "I hated 'Deku.' But...ever since joining U.A. and meeting all of you guys…"

He meet Bakugou's eyes for a brief moment, and in defiance, he grins.

"...If I've accepted 'Deku,'" Izuku says, turning to his classmates, "if I've accepted the insult and turned it around into something positive, then...it can't hurt me anymore."

He sees Uraraka beam at him, clapping her hands together quietly, and the rest of Izuku's friends cheer and clap and whoop a second later.

(Aside from Bakugou, of course, but he doesn't count.)

"Wonderful job, Midoriya," Midnight says, smiling at him. "Deku it is!"

Izuku beams back at her.

Toshinori (or, rather, "All Might") pulls Izuku aside after lunch as he and his friends head back to Class 1-A. After a quick "catch ya later!" to Kirishima and Uraraka (Iida has been avoiding them--Izuku decides to give him space, if just for now), Izuku follows Toshinori (All Might) down the hall in the opposite direction, finally turning a corner and stepping into a more darkened hall.

Izuku frowns at him. Howler sits patiently at his side, waiting. "What's up?"

"It's about the internships," Toshinori says simply; he drops his All Might persona, resuming his normal form. "As I'm sure you're aware, you got several offers from different agencies."

Izuku nods. "It's a little crazy, when I think about it," he says, rubbing the back of his neck. "I wasn't expecting so many…"

Toshinori nods. "Well," he says, "if you feel more inclined to go to one of those agencies rather than meet with my...acquaintance, then feel free. This is your internship, so it's ultimately your choice which one you go to. I don't want you to feel pressured into taking my suggestion."

“Still scared of Gran, huh, Toshinori?” Nana’s voice says in Izuku’s head. *“Makes sense, I guess…”*

Izuku blinks at Toshinori. “Who’s Gran? Is that this ‘acquaintance’ you keep talking about?”

Toshinori blinks at him. “How did you--” He stops after that and sighs, shaking his head. “I forgot. Nana told you, right?”

Izuku nods.

“Gran Torino is a retired hero,” Toshinori explains. “He was my teacher when I was attending U.A., and a sworn friend of Nana. He knows a lot about One For All, so I thought he’d be the obvious person to intern with, but I wanted you to make the choice--”

“It sounds perfect!” Izuku blurts, and then, calming down a bit more, “I-I, sorry for interrupting, just…” He pauses, biting his lip. “If he can help me learn to control One For All, then...then I think that’s the right choice.”

Toshinori studies him for a moment--then, he smiles and nods. “Alright,” he says, “in that case--oh, hold on.” He pauses, reaching around and pulling a folded yellow envelope from his back pocket. “Here. Recovery Girl wanted me to give this to you.”

Izuku takes it, curious, and tears it open. He overturns the envelope in his hand; an odd looking bracelet falls out of it, with a little, darkened bulb on one side, and a button on the other. It’s secured with velcro.

“It’s a medical bracelet,” Toshinori explains. “In light of the internships and taking your Quirk situation into consideration, Recovery Girl thought it’d be a good thing for you to have. What it basically does is monitor your pulse continually. If your pulse drops below a certain level--that is, if you’re out of your body for a dangerous amount of time--the light’ll start blinking.”

“Oh,” Izuku says, examining it with newfound curiosity. “Nifty. But, I mean, velcro?” He snaps the velcro off, then wraps the bracelet around his wrist. It’s a little bulky, but a snug fit. “Velcro...is such a rip off.”

Toshinori sighs. “I need to start thinking of better comebacks…”

“You should,” Izuku says, grinning. “Or, at least *bracing,”* he holds up his wrist, with the bracelet around it, “yourself for the puns.”

"...I have...no idea what Gran is going to think of you."

"I don't think anyone really knows what to think of me."

"...Fair. Even so." He ruffles Izuku's hair and offers a smile. "Good luck, kid."

"Thanks!" Izuku says, beaming back at him. "Granted, I have no idea what I'm doing, but it should be fun!"

A beat. Toshinori stares at him.

"Was that...another pun?"

Izuku shrugs in mock innocence.

"Hmm...I'm afraid I do not see what you mean, my boy. This Midoriya Izuku boy...I don't see anything interesting about him."

Shigaraki's hands (his real ones) are shaking at his sides. Kurogiri stands behind the bar, arms behind his back, and Shigaraki's arms and legs are bandaged from still-healing bullet wounds.

"He didn't use it in the festival," Shigaraki says. "I'm telling you, this kid's power…"

"Hmm…" The faceless voice from the small little television set hums; the screen displays the words, "transmission in progress." *"I find it odd that he didn't use such a power in the festival, if it really is as powerful as you described…"*

"It is," Shigaraki insists, facing the television and pleading his case. "He must've been afraid to use it in front of such a large crowd of people...yes, that makes sense...yes, that must be it…"

"Shigraraki Tomura--"

"Listen," Shigaraki says, "I wouldn't be saying this if I wasn't serious. This brat...his power...it's…"

"I can vouch for Shigaraki," Kurogiri says. "Pardon my intrusion--"

"No, please, feel free, Kurogiri."

"Midoriya Izuku's Quirk is indeed a mystery," Kurogiri goes on. "A dangerous mystery as well. At the USJ, right when we had All Might

in our grasp...the boy leapt in out of nowhere, with a suddenly transparent body and leading seven unnamed figures, as though he were commanding an army."

Silence.

"...Seven figures, you say?"

Shigaraki has stopped trying to answer, so Kurogiri does it in his stead. "Yes, that is correct."

"Hmmmmm." The voice is laced with amusement this time. *"Is that so? Interesting...I will have to keep this boy in mind, then, for the future. Midoriya Izuku…"*

There's a smile behind his voice.

"...What an intriguing child."

Chapter End Notes

SHOULD BE FUN.

Also please excuse how long it's taking me to get these chapters out, ehrkjshdkfjdf. The end of the school year's comin' up so I've got quite a few tests and that's taking up most of my time rn. However, I did pass my chem final and the most recent geometry test, so!! I'm glad!! :D

Anyway, thank you all sO MUCH FOR ALL YOUR SUPPORT I LOVE YOU ALL SO MUCH AND YOUR SUPPORT MEANS THE WORLD TO ME THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU!!!!! :D I'll try to get the next chapter out soon!!!! :D

Until then, go beyond! PLUS ULTRA!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

To Break In a Glove

Chapter Summary

"To Break In a Glove" from Dear Evan Hansen

“It just takes a little patience, it just takes a little time,
A little perseverance, and a little uphill climb.
You might not think it’s worth it, you might begin to doubt,
But you can’t take any shortcuts. You gotta stick it out.
And it’s the hard way, but it’s the right way,
The right way, to break in a glove.”

Chapter Notes

ART!! :D

solarflare-vulpix

THANK YOU SO MUCH!! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

[Midoriya]
Iida? You awake?

[Tenya]
Yes. What’s wrong?

[Midoriya]
Nothing, I just…
Wanted to remind you that I’m here for you.

[Tenya]
I know. Thank you.
I apologize for keeping to myself most of today.

[Midoriya]
No, that’s fine. I…understand you needing space.
But remember that you aren’t alone, okay?
If you need someone to talk to…
It doesn’t have to be me, but, it has to be somebody, okay?

[Tenya]
…Alright, Midoriya.

Thank you.

[Midoriya]
Yeah, no problem. Goodnight.

[Tenya]
Goodnight. Sleep well.

[Midoriya]
Yeah, you too.
I'll leave my phone on. Lemme know if you need anything. Or just wanna talk. I'm always here.

[MIDORIYA IS OFFLINE]

He didn't give me the chance to respond.

Tenya darkens his screen and settles his phone on the bedside table, then rests his hands in his lap and stares down at him. He thinks of Midoriya's words--spoken to him on the way to school earlier this morning, and now texted to him over the phone--and he knows his friend is right, he *knows.*

Then, what…

Tenya clenches his fists, fingernails leaving crescent-shaped indentations on his palms. He feels a burning ache in his chest unlike anything he's felt before; a burning ache that's been there ever since his mother phoned him at the Sports Festival, ever since he found out what happened to his older brother.

His hands begin to tremble.

…What am I supposed to do…with all these feelings?

Izuku is worried about Iida again, and it's a constant thing, this worry; he isn't sure he *won't* be worried about his friend until he starts acting like himself again (which can take however long it needs to take; Izuku is in no hurry and he's certainly not going to rush Iida, not after he and his family went through such a travesty).

He rolls over on his side and dangles his hand off the bed, absentmindedly tangling his fingers in Howler's thick fur. His bell is on the bedside table, but he resists the urge to reach for it.

He shuts his eyes. *I'll ask him how he is again tomorrow at school,* he

thinks, breathing deeply for a moment or two. *Until then…*

…Hold on…

…I wonder…

He feels his consciousness wane.

…Which agency Iida chose for the internships…

He isn't in his body anymore. He's standing on a rooftop, wind in foreign hair, sun setting in the corner of his vision. The sight would be beautiful any other day, any other time, but not now, definitely not now, because if he looks away for a second he's gonna die, he's gonna end up impaled or crushed or some other horrible form of death--

"You're definitely tenacious, I'll give you that."

Pain spikes up the length of his chest (a chest that isn't his, a body that doesn't belong to him), and he wraps foreign arms around himself, feeling like he's passenger instead of driver. Warmth seeps through his sleeves and into his skin and oh, yeah, he's bleeding, he's been bleeding for a while now--

"However…"

A man steps forward and stands across from him on the wide rooftop, planting his feet firmly on the ground.

"…Raw tenacity can only get you so far," the villain says, stretching out a hand. *"What say you give up? Relinquish One For All and stop this chain of death and despair?"*

He barks a laugh. *"Listen, buddy--"* (The voice is of a young man's; maybe twenty or thirty), *"Hate to break it to ya, but I was entrusted this power on my friend's deathbed, and I'm not about to let him down."*

"Hmm, interesting…" The villain grins at him, short hair ruffled by the wind. *"So you'll keep fighting, then? You'll fight and die, just like the ones before you?"*

"Hell yeah I will," not-him says, shifting into a stance and putting up his fists. *"You've hurt and killed so many people, do you really think I'm gonna take that sitting down? I'm surprised. Kinda expected a little more, to be honest."*

Everything after that passes in a blur. The villain moves and strikes

and then he's falling, there's wind in his hair and ears and he fires up One For All, the familiar burn and warmth spreading through foreign skin. He fires off a blast at the ground and launches himself back into the air, facing the villain, grinning despite the pain.

"You're gonna kill me, here and now. I know that. But I ain't letting you go without a scar!"

The villain laughs. *"Your tenacity amuses me. Now…"* He raises an arm. *"Die."*

He feels like he's being crushed, like all his bones are contracting and seizing up at once, and then he's freefalling, and he tries, he tries so desperately to summon One For All, to drag its power back up from within, but it hurts so badly and the ground is too close--

He slams into it.

He doesn't die. Not yet. He lays there, blood in his ears, warm, sticky *something* beneath him. His eyes burn as black clouds over, and he feels a laugh bubble from his chest, sad and hurt and *oww, my ribs, I need to stop laughing now.*

I'm sorry, he thinks desperately, and the laugh chokes and turns into a sob, and he coughs and there's metal in his throat, there's blood in his throat. *I'm sorry, Sensei. I gave it my best shot, though, y'know? I really gave it my best shot.*

I'm…

Sorry, that I wasn't good enough. He was a better successor than me. It should've…

The thought gets lost as his chest constricts and his lungs fill with blood.

...I'm sorry, Sensei.

I'm...sorry...Dai...

He looks upwards at the orange-yellow sky, shadows crossing over and fading into black.

The sunset…

...Is really, really beautiful…

And Izuku snaps awake. He doesn't scream like he'd done the first time he lived through an ex-holder's death; no, this awakening is...sharp. Sudden. Silent. His sudden intake of breath gets caught on the sobs in his throat, and he brings his hands up to his mouth, trying to stifle his sobs.

Dai. This is the first time there's been an unfamiliar name in one of these dreams. Dai, Dai, *who the hell is Dai--*

"Kiddo, breathe."

It's just Nana. None of the others (yet). They're probably trying not to overwhelm him.

Izuku sucks in a long breath all at once, then lets it out, slowly and shudderingly, feeling like every bone in his body trembles with it. He becomes aware of something pressing against his arm, still hanging off the bed, and he moves his hand blindly in the darkness until his fingers run through Howler's fur.

"I'm okay," he gasps, both to himself and to the anxiously waiting voices in his head. "I-I'm okay, I-I'm…"

Howler pushes against his hand again, and this time, Izuku moves his arm and pats the space beside him on the bed.

"C'mon, Howler," he says, and the dog looks at him quizzically, confused. "It's okay this time, boy, come on."

Howler doesn't wait after that; he leaps onto the bed beside Izuku, and Izuku promptly hugs the dog and drags him down to lay with him. Howler complies, nuzzling his snout beneath Izuku's chin, and Izuku buries his face against the top of Howler's head and takes in a deep breath.

He's okay.

He'll…

...He'll be okay.

The internships come upon them sooner than expected, and Izuku and his classmates are following Aizawa through the busy train station, rolling suitcases or hauling duffle bags or backpacks, depending on how each student packed their luggage. The only consistent carry-on

item were the briefcases for their hero costumes.

It's been a week since Izuku's last...well...since he last experienced one of the ex-holders' deaths through his own thoughts and senses. The backlash wasn't as bad this time as it'd been before, with Nana's death; he's okay now. It'd taken some time and he hadn't been able to sleep again that night, but he's okay now.

He thinks.

He still has no idea who "Dai" is, and the ex-holders have been mysteriously quiet, for the most part. He assumed originally it was to give him space, but he thinks now that it might be something else.

Maybe it's guilt.

Either way, as they head into the train station behind Aizawa, Izuku slides up to Todoroki and bumps their shoulders together, lightly but intentionally. Todoroki stares at him incredigiously.

"What was that for?"

"Just wondering what agency you picked for the internship," Izuku answers simply. Todoroki blinks, and Izuku shakes his head, then flashes him a grin. "You got thousands of offers, Thermostat," Izuku goes on, "and I'm curious. So?"

Todoroki faces forward again. "I picked my father's agency."

Izuku's feet screech to a halt, as does Howler beside him. Todoroki takes a couple steps before realizing he's stopped, then does a half-turn back towards him. "What is it?"

"Out of the *thousands of offers* you got," Izuku says, blinking. "You picked. *Endeavor's."*

"Yes."

Izuku blinks again. "...You're gonna have to explain that to me some more because where I see it, interning with literal garbage is a complete waste of your time. This internship thing is a huge deal for us as first years, is it really something you wanna waste on *Endeavor?"*

Todoroki sighs heavily, pulling his bag further over his shoulder. When he starts walking, Izuku jogs to catch up, then flanks him.

“Believe me, I hate it, too,” Todoroki says, “but despite what should or shouldn’t be, my father is the number two hero, and there’s no denying his skill and experience in the field. It took a lot of wrestling with myself, but…I think I made the right choice.”

Izuku blinks at him again, then lets out a huge, heaving sigh and shakes his head. “Well, I mean, I get it,” he says. “I hate it, but I get it. If you start feeling threatened, though, call the police.”

Todoroki frowns. “Mido--”

“I’m serious,” Izuku cuts in. “If your father tries to hurt you, call the police on him. Or, if you don’t wanna call the police, at least call me. I’ll play the role of ‘angry poltergeist’ long enough for you to get out of there.”

“I don’t think that will be necessary,” Todoroki says, turning away. “But, I’ll keep that in mind.”

“I’ll take it.” Izuku gives it a moment, then grins at him. “Anyway, good luck, Thermostat. See ya in a week.”

“You too, Spearmint.”

Izuku doesn’t groan or roll his eyes; he really has no right to, and with a parting wave, he and Todoroki split off into separate directions, each heading for a different departing train.

“Deku!”

“Yo, Midoriya!”

Izuku turns in time to watch Uraraka and Kirishima finish crossing the distance between them and him. Uraraka is beaming, suitcase bouncing behind her as she runs, and Kirishima is smiling likewise, a hand raised in greeting.

“Mornin’,” Izuku says, smiling, when they stop in front of him. “So, you guys found an agency you feel confident about?”

“Well, I mean, I dunno how confident I am about it,” Kirishima says, rubbing the back of his neck, “but, I mean, I picked the one I thought would best suit me, so I’m good!”

Izuku nods and grins. “Good luck, then.”

“Thanks!” Kirishima says, and flashes him a thumbs-up. “How about

you, Uraraka?" He nudges her arm with his elbow. "Which agency did you choose?"

"I picked Gunhead's agency," Uraraka says, beaming. "He's a really good combat instructor, so I thought--"

She stops suddenly mid-thought as Iida strides past them, not even giving them so much as a glance. His suitcase rolls behind him, and he's clenching the handle of his briefcase with a white-knuckled grip.

Izuku, Kirishima and Uraraka exchange glances.

They nod.

"Iida!" Izuku, Kirishima and Uraraka call in scattered unison, sprinting to catch up with him. Iida stops, pauses, then turns around to face them. It's...hard to tell exactly what he's thinking, by the look on his face. He looks like normal, nothing-is-wrong *Iida,* but Izuku knows there's something deeper here.

"Midoriya...Kirishima...Uraraka," Iida greets stiffly. "What are you doing? We have trains to catch--"

"I want you to remember what I said before," Izuku cuts in sharply, but not rudely. "About not being alone, I mean. If you need someone to talk to, I'm always here."

"Me too," Kirishima says, nodding firmly. "I'm crap with words, but I mean, if you just need someone to listen, I've got your back."

"And me, too, Iida," Uraraka says, swallowing hard. "We love you a lot, you know that, right?"

Iida inhales sharply, and Izuku *does not* like the long moment of silence in between Uraraka's question and Iida's answer.

"...Yes, I do," Iida says, needlessly re-adjusting his grip on the briefcase. "Thank you. All of you. Good luck on the internships."

"You too," Izuku says, feeling a little numb, and Uraraka and Kirishima echo his words with the same nonexistent enthusiasm while Iida turns away, suitcase rolling and bumping behind him.

Izuku watches him go. He's aware of Uraraka telling him she has to go catch her train, and Kirishima saying basically the same thing, and he feels his lips move in a response, a final "good luck" before he doesn't

see them for a week, but…

All he's *really* thinking about right now is Iida.

And the fact that his words were very, very unconvincing.

Izuku is, like, 99% sure he has the wrong address.

The house is...rickety, not really what he'd expect from a retired pro hero. He'd envisioned Gran Torino's abode so differently; spacious, with a nice lawn--or, even, at the bare minimum, a *well-structured building that didn't look like it was gonna collapse on itself with a gust of wind.*

Except, that's what it looks like. It looks like a run-down old shack with blown-out windows boarded up with planks of wood and at least twenty nails each, and the porch is overrun by weeds that sprang up between cracks in the cement (or, rather, what was left of what had probably once been a decent little concrete patio).

Izuku looks down at the address on his phone, then back up at the building. He tilts his head to one side quizzically, and he catches Howler doing the same out of the corner of his eye.

"So," Izuku says, turning to the dog, "what do you think about all this?"

Howler gives him this bright-eyed, tongue-lolling-out-of-mouth look that Izuku can't determine nor argue with, so he decides not to do anything. Rather, he turns back to the building and frowns at it for a good long while.

"You've got the right place, kiddo," Nana says in his head. *"You're good, just go ahead in there and be yourself."*

Izuku frowns, not at her considering he can't see her, but it's meant for her, at least.

"'Myself' is kind of hit or miss," Izuku says, still frowning. "Are you sure that's a good idea?"

"Positive. It's like I said, Izuku. Go out there…"

Izuku sighs. "'And shine like the shooting star you are,'" he drones, "I get it."

“Hey, you can’t shine with that *attitude!”*

Her voice in his head is so loud now that it actually hurts his ears, and he jumps and winces.

“Just go drop dead in front of Gran or something! Let him be on the receiving end for a change! Do what you do best!”

“OkayokayIgetit!” Izuku says, shaking his head feverishly. “I’m going, alright!? I’m going!”

“Good.”

“Good luck, boyo.”

“Have fun!”

“We’ll be cheering for you!”

“Silently, though.”

“Yeah, silently.”

Izuku sighs, shakes his head one more time, then steels himself and makes his way across the patio and to the porch. There are weeds and small, dead trees littering the lawn, and Izuku does his best to ignore it, stepping up to the door and rapping his knuckles against it.

“H-Hello?” he calls, knocking a little harder.

This time, the door actually creaks open, and Izuku steps backwards, withdrawing his hand. Through the crack in the door, he makes out nothing but shadows and darkness from the interior of the rickety, shack-like building.

“...Yep,” Izuku says, peering into the darkness. “Cliche as hell.”

Howler doesn’t seem all that bothered by the situation, though, so that’s probably a good sign. Probably. If there were ghosts here (other than Izuku’s own “wandering spirit”) Howler wouldn’t be as relaxed as he is now. One thing the dog has never liked is Izuku’s ghost presence.

Izuku prods the door open with the toe of his boot. “Helloooo? You haunted in there?”

The door creaks, but that’s about the only answer he gets.

“Hellooooooooo?”

He pokes the door open further.

A draft of wind from outside blows the door open suddenly, the momentum slamming it right into the inner wall by the doorframe. Howler jumps, as does Izuku, but the moment passes quickly--but that doesn’t mean Izuku’s heart returns to normal tempo yet.

“...Cliche, as, hell,” Izuku says again, mostly to himself. It’s still dark for the most part, but now, as sunlight streams through the open door, he can make out...something on the ground.

Izuku frowns. It’s still shrouded in darkness, the light from the doors not quite reaching it, but he’s able to make out the silhouette. It looks...something like a small body?

His eyes adjust. He can see their light faintly in the darkness.

Oh.

It *is* a small body of what *looks* like a very old man, face-down in...something, lying on the floor in a still, unmoving heap.

Oh, huge mood.

Howler steps forward immediately and sniffs the unmoving figure once or twice, then looks at Izuku pointedly. Yeah. Nothing to see here, then. Izuku remembers Nana’s words faintly: *“You have similar senses of humor…”*

Oh.

Gran Torino is…

...Playing...dead…?

...Huh.

Well.

Izuku can roll with that, he supposes.

He really, really doesn’t know what else to do. And when Nana’s advice of *just be yourself* runs through his head again, there’s really no stopping him.

“HE’S *DEAD!”* Izuku wails, throwing both hands out towards Gran Torino’s body to point. “HOW TRAGIC, A TRUE TRAVESTY. WHATEVER SHALL I--”

And then Gran Torino’s head snaps off the ground with a cheerful “I’M ALIVE!!” to which Howler yipes and Izuku barely flinches.

“HE’S *ALIIIIIIIIVE,”* Izuku says with fake bravado, flailing his hands for a moment. “EXCEPT, *PLOT-TWIST!”* He shifts his feet into a more stage-dramatic position and grins, raising his fingers to snap for dramatic effect. “‘Twas *I* who was dead all along!”

And he freaking drops.

He isn’t sure he should find the startled, strangled kinda noise Gran Torino makes satisfying, but he does.

Howler moves and sits by his body, like he’s been trained to do, and Izuku’s ghost hovers over it, hands over his mouth, trying not to laugh. Gran Torino gets to his feet (he was lying in a puddle of ketchup and sausages, for some reason--playing up the “oh I’m dead” thing a little too much, perhaps), and he lets out a long, heaving sigh.

“So he was telling the truth about you,” Gran Torino says heavily. “Well--”

“Shhh, I’m dead,” Izuku says, gliding across the room without Gran Torino’s knowledge. Gran Torino doesn’t turn; or, at least, he doesn’t, right up until Izuku rattles the small, empty coffee table by the couch before promptly tipping it over on its side.

“Oh, how the tables have turned,” Izuku says.

There’s a beat.

“...Toshinori was right,” Gran Torino says with a sigh. “Don’t know if you’re aware of this, but he’s told me quite a bit about you already, and--”

“Nice,” Izuku says, grinning. “I have a reputation.”

“It isn’t a good one.”

Izuku flips the table. “WELL THEN.”

The kid is...odd.

And that honestly feels like it's putting it very, very lightly, because this kid is *very, very odd.* Toshinori has told Gran Torino quite a bit about the person of Midoriya Izuku already; that he's a major punster, has a heart of pure gold, and can literally eject his ghost from his body with a Quirk that could literally kill him if he stays outside his body for too long.

There...isn't time to mess around, not when the kid has a Quirk like that.

"I won't waste time monologuing," Gran says, once the kid's spirit is back in its body where it belongs. "Your Quirks, both of them. One For All and Dissociate, but specifically One For All. How does One For All handle when you use it as a ghost?"

The kid blinks at him. "How does it….handle…?"

"Yeah," Gran answers. "How does it feel when you're using it?"

"I-I mean," Izuku says, frowning, "it feels like it does when I use it in my actual body, except, maybe more...spread out, if that make sense? Plus, the actual effects it has on my ghost are different than what it has on my body."

Gran Torino nods. It's...rapid-fire, all of this, perhaps, but he'd seen the news. He'd seen what people were talking about, following the USJ. "Fifteen year old Midoriya Izuku"'s injuries had been blamed on Shigaraki's Nomu, but, going by what Toshinori told him, plus a bit of his own assumptions, Gran know there's...something else.

The kid's own Quirk was the cause of most his suffering back then.

"Different, how so?" Gran asks, flipping open the kid's briefcase and looking over his costume idly.

"I-I mean, it doesn't enhance my speed or my strength like it does when I use it physically," Izuku answers quickly. "It makes my ghost visible, though, and I can summon--"

"Yeah, I know about the summoning thing," Gran cuts in sharply, "but what about what you said before? The visible thing? People can see your ghost when you use One For All as one?"

Izuku frowns at him. "This is...happening pretty quickly--"

"Your Quirk could kill you if you ain't careful, boy," Gran says,

pulling the briefcase shut again. “You’ve got a nice costume there. Go ahead and get suited up. We’ll have a little sparring session.”

Izuku blinks. “I--”

“Fight me like you’d fight me anyway,” Gran says, “ghost Quirk and all. But, in light of what happened at the USJ, I’m gonna have to ask that you don’t summon any of the past holders without medical attention in reach. Got that?”

There’s a moment. Gran catches Izuku glancing down at his wrist, where there’s a very odd-looking bracelet strapped, but Izuku looks up again quickly and nods.

“Okay.”

Gran nods back at him, swinging his cane to point at the briefcase. “Well, hop to it.”

Izuku nods and scurries on past him, trailed by his service dog, and Gran turns and starts in the opposite direction to give the boy some privacy.

“Ahh, Gran Torino, sir?”

“Yeah, what is it?”

“Nana wants me to tell you that it isn’t your fault.”

Gran Torino stops mid-step. “...When did she say that?”

“Just now,” the boy says at once. “I can...talk to her. Her and the past holders of One For All. Wha--oh, they all say hello. One of them wants to punch you, for some reason.”

Gran Torino turns back towards the kid. The kid, eyes glowing softly in the half-dark room, with that jagged scar split across his face, unnatural and odd and really *how did it even get there?,* and honestly, Gran...doesn’t know what to think.

About any of this, really. About the boy, about his Quirk(s), about his ability to summon the past holders. About his ability to summon N--

“...Nana says you’re acting weird,” Izuku says, twiddling your thumbs. “She wants me to tell you that it isn’t your fault. And, I-I mean, I don’t know what you’re upset with yourself about, but...I’m sure she’s right.”

Gran Torino lets out a long sigh, then steps forward again, turning his back to the kid once more.

“Knowledge of a fact is one thing. Acceptance of a fact is another.”

And he leaves the kid and Nana behind, for now. He’ll be back in a few moments, and he’ll spar with the kid, and he has no idea what to expect from him, what to expect from his fighting style (other than the fact that he can’t use One For All physically without blasting his bones to bits).

His number one reason for prohibiting Izuku’s summoning of the past holders was, of course, the boy’s personal health and well-being.

But a deeper part of him thinks it may also have been influenced by guilt brought by the thought of seeing Nana again.

“He blames himself for my death.”

Izuku halts, half-way through pulling a glove onto his hand. “What…?”

“He wasn’t there,” Nana goes on, softly. Very softly. *“No one was there, just me and…”* She stops then, and it’s silent again for a time. *“...He trained Toshi in my stead, and he loved him, don’t get me wrong, but I think what really drove him to do it is he felt like...he felt like he owed it to me.”*

Izuku swallows thickly. The support group added a couple alterations to his costume--a couple “upgrades,” if you would--but he doesn’t give himself much time to think about it.

“...How old was Toshinori-san?” Izuku asks. “When you…”

“...He was about your age.”

It slams into him like a semi-truck, and he wonders how hard it’d been, how painful it was for his younger mentor. He puts himself in those shoes for a moment, thinks about how devastating it’d be for him if he suddenly lost Toshinori-san--

Nope, nopenopenope, that is a downright *terrifying* thought and he won’t dwell on it.

Anyway, yeah! Those new upgrades on his hero costume! Those are super cool now all of a sudden! Yeah! Think about those!

Lalalalalalaaaaa--

There's a note taped to the bottom of the lid of the briefcase that he's only noticing now; Izuku tears it free and inspects it.

Ten Million -

HEY~~~! So I'm working on a couple new designs for your hero costume, hope you don't mind!! A lot of the equipment is still underway though so I won't have it for you until next week sometime. D: BE PATIENT WITH ME THOUGH I PROMISE ONCE I GET IT TO YOU IT'LL BE THE MOST AMAZING THING YOU'VE EVER SEEN!! :D :D :D

But yeah until then you're gonna have to do without your helmet!! Sorry for the inconvenience but I swear to you upon my honor that it WILL BE WORTH IT :D

Wishing you luck! Skulls are pretty hard anyway so you should be fine granted you don't ram yourself into a building and/or get the worst luck in the world and run into really powerful villains. :D

Yours,
Hatsume Mei, Support Group

Ahhh, Hatsume. Guess she's working on his hero costume personally now. He reminds himself to thank her later, then finishes putting on his gloves and boots, and then he's ready.

"I'll say whatever I can to him," Izuku tells Nana quietly. "I don't think he'll listen--not now, at least--but, I mean...I'll...do whatever I can."

"Alright, kiddo. Don't stress yourself out over it, either, 'kay? You've got enough to think about already."

Izuku nods. He gives himself a final check-over before deeming himself ready for battle.

He has to lock Howler upstairs in the bedroom, because the dog obviously will not like Gran Torino's fighting him, but that's alright. Gives Izuku one less thing to think about.

He turns to face the old man, absentmindedly balling his fists at his sides. The ex-holders shout a few words of encouragement in his head, and then fall silent to let him focus. Gran Torino stretches his legs for

a moment or two, cane set off to the side.

“Don’t go easy on me just ‘cause I’m an old man, boy,” Gran Torino says, rising into a stance. “Because I will certainly not go easy on you.”

Izuku nods, shifting his feet and putting up his fists. “I wouldn’t expect you to go easy on me, anyway,” he says, “or appreciate it. Can’t get better at fighting if my opponent dumbs himself down, amirite?”

Gran Torino grins at him, like some kind of a snake zeroing in on its prey. “Nice thinking. Now--try landing a hit on me with One For All.”

Izuku has just about enough time to think, *Oh, crap, I’m dead,* before Gran Torino springs.

Izuku throws himself out of the way, and Gran Torino’s feet slam into the far wall; but then he’s moving again, faster than before, jetstreams flying from the bottoms of his feet.

Like Iida’s Quirk, Izuku thinks, biting his lip. *Sort of.*

“Quit standing around!”

Gran whips past him, fast like a bullet, and Izuku is knocked to the ground. It’s weird, falling and being able to feel the impact; he’s sure he’ll be covered by bruises by the end of this, and for once it won’t be his fault.

Come on, think! Izuku gets to his feet again, only to be knocked down by Gran Torino again by a knock to the back of his head. Gran Torino bounces off the ceiling, towards him; Izuku drops out of his body immediately, just like that.

He doesn’t do it because he’s smart or has a strategy in mind. He does it because it’s a habit and because he literally has no idea what else to do but he’d *really rather stop being pummelled thank you very much.*

Gran Torino swings his legs out in front of him and uses a quick thrust of his jets to blast himself backwards, away from Izuku’s fallen body. “So you’ve finally decided to do something!” Gran says, feet hitting the ground and momentum carrying him backwards. “I’ll say one thing, boy, leaving your body unguarded when fighting a villain…is a *really* stupid thing to do.”

“Who said anything about it being unguarded?” Izuku quips, grinning.

It's nice to be a ghost again; he feels free and, yes, *floaty,* plus he doesn't feel any pain from developing bruises, which is nice. "Come at me, I dare you."

"I said to land a hit on me with One For All," Gran Torino says, crouching. "You haven't even *tried* using it yet, boy!"

He launches himself at Izuku again, and Izuku moves toward to meet him. His brain is ticking, and he thinks he has... *something* of a strategy. Honestly, he feels pretty confident using Dissociate in a fight; it's One For All that comes to kick him in the butt, though.

Which means, what he *should* be doing,

is finding a way to wield One For All--his stronger Quirk--and use Dissociate to enhance that. Use Dissociate for strategies and surprise attacks, then use One For All to finish it off.

Izuku phases through Gran Torino--or, rather, they phase through each other, Gran Torino blasting through the air and Izuku running towards him. It's uncomfortable for both of them; Izuku feels like there are bugs crawling all over him for a solid second or two, but doesn't give much time to think about it.

Gran Torino, in his hesitation, has once again swung his legs out before him and is now in the air just above Izuku's physical body.

Shigaraki thought the same thing, Izuku thinks, grinning. *No one expects a dead body to come back to life.*

Izuku returns to his body in a snap and pulls back his physical fist, and although he'd been a ghost for the majority of this fight, he feels adrenaline course through his veins.

And then, Gran Torino moves again.

As Izuku is about to throw the punch, Gran blasts himself downwards with his jets. His fingers curl around Izuku's wrist--the one belonging to the arm about to throw the punch--and his knuckles slam into the ground as his hand is pinned to his side. Gran Torino's foot rests on his chest, pinning him to the ground and keeping him there.

"So that's your solution," Gran Torino says. "Just blowing your bones to bits, just like you did at the Sports Festival."

Izuku sinks his teeth into his bottom lip. Gran Torino releases him and

steps back, brushing himself off, and Izuku sits up, absentmindedly rubbing the back of his head.

“You’re pretty good, honestly, for a rookie,” Gran says, and Izuku can’t tell if that’s meant as a compliment or an insult. “You’ve got a good sense of knowing when to and when not to use Dissociate, which is good. We won’t have to deal with that, at least.”

Izuku lowers his hand back down to his side, nodding stiffly. “I mean, I already used Dissociate in a fight before, without One For All,” he says, “so, a lot of what I know is just…I know how to scare people when they’re least expecting it.”

“And that’s great,” Gran says. “It’s good to be able to bring the best out of your Quirk and to know when to use it in certain situations. Except…” Gran lets out a huge, *huge* sigh. “You’re a pretty smart kid, but when it comes to One For All, you’re a complete dunderhead. You’re almost as bad as your mentor.”

Izuku actually winces at that.

“Ouch.”

“Oh rude.”

“Dammit old man, say something nice.”

“You’re doing great, sweetie, don’t listen to him.”

“So what, then?” Izuku asks, and the voices in his head still. “What does that mean?”

“One For All,” Gran Torino says, turning to him. “You’re thinking about it wrong. You’ve got it stuck in your head that One For All is somethin’ it ain’t.”

Izuku blinks. “…You made more sense when you were playing dead in a puddle of ketchup.”

Gran Torino whacks his ankle with his cane, and Izuku yipes and springs back, raising his leg to clutch the new soon-to-be-bruises.

“Don’t sass me, boy!” Gran snaps at him, leaning against the cane he *definitely does not need.* “Like I said, you’re smart, and you’ve already got a head start with you tellin’ me how it feels when you use it as a ghost. You can figure it out.”

Izuku lowers his leg again, still wincing a bit from the hit. “So, what? What am I supposed to be figuring out?”

“There’s a reason for your breaking your arms every time you fire off One For All,” Gran Torino says, turning and heading for the kitchen already. “Find out why. That’s your first step.”

Izuku bites his lip. “I’m...not sure where to start.”

“Just get it out of your head that One For All is special,” Gran answers shortly. “Do that. Look at One For All like you’d look at any other Quirk. Analyze it. You’re good at that, aren’t you?”

“Well, I-I mean, yes,” Izuku says, “but--”

“But nothing,” Gran cuts in. “Find out why you break your arms, then we’ll talk. In the meantime, breakfast!”

Breakfa--?

“Kind of a random change of subject,” Izuku says, frowning--and then he’s leaping out of the way to avoid Gran’s swinging cane again.

“You’ve got it stuck in your head that One For All is something it ain’t.”

Okay that’s great, Izuku thinks, staring up at the ceiling angrily, *but what does that actually mean? What is One For All to me? How do I feel about it?*

...What are my thoughts on One For All?

He…

...Has absolutely no idea.

One For All is...power. It’s pure, unbridled power, that’s what it is. A Quirk passed down through generations, one after the other, cultivating power and moving it along.

He’s lying in bed right now, Howler curled on a blanket beside him, and outside the window (through the cracks of wooden planks boarding it up), Izuku sees night sky and the tops of high buildings.

He can’t believe it.

A day has passed and he’s no closer to learning how to properly wield

One For All.

“Hey, I have a question,” Izuku says to the voices in his head, “what was One For All like for all of you?”

“Oh! One For All was rad, dude.”

“Honestly, I never had a problem wielding it, boyo. Not like you do. I never broke my arms or anything like that.”

“I think One For All is personal to the user, sweetheart. It’s different for everyone.”

“Definitely. It’s not something you need to be stressing over, really, you’ll figure it out. Just, find your way around it, just like you did when you found out about your first Quirk.”

“Yeah, what he said. Practice, learn what you can, and keep learning as you go along. It’s all part of the experience.”

Izuku takes in a deep breath and lets it out slowly. “Thanks,” he says. “Maybe I should go outside for a bit and practice, while I still can--”

“Oh hell no, kid.”

“You’ve got a hard time sleepin’ as it is, you ain’t goin’ out there in the dark on your own.”

“Seriously, don’t. You’ll have plenty of time to work more with Gran tomorrow. There’s no rush, and there’s certainly no need for you to push yourself beyond what your body can take.”

Izuku sighs again. “It’s like...having seven overbearing parents…”

“WELL OUCH.”

“I’m not old!”

“Think I’m a little closer to being your big brother, but hey.”

“Well, if you weren’t so reckless, we wouldn’t NEED to be overbearing parents.”

Izuku pretends to be fed up with it, really, he does, but it’s endearing. “Seriously, though, thank you,” he says, and the voices finally stop rioting to listen to him. “I’ll figure out One For All, I know I will, just...for now…”

"Yeah, you're bound to be frustrated, I get it," Nana says. *"We all get it. But you gotta keep moving. Don't let the frustration bog you down too much."*

Izuku nods. He reaches over and grabs his phone off the bedside table, opening his messenger and finding Iida's contact. It's late, and chances are, knowing Iida, he's probably already gone to bed, but even so.

[Izuku]
Hey, me again.
Sorry if this is getting annoying. Let me know and I'll stop.
Just wanted to say good luck with the internships, and if you're awake now and are seeing this, goodnight!
Let's both do our best.

He sets the phone by his hand on the bed and waits. It takes a good ten minutes, but then, the phone dings with Iida's response.

[Iida]
Goodnight, Midoriya.

It's simple, but it's enough. Izuku closes out of his messages and leans back, shutting his eyes. Howler nudges his hand, and Izuku runs his fingers over the dog's head for a moment.

He falls asleep.

It happens again.

He's in a body that isn't his own, and he hears his own hoarse breathing, accompanied by the hum of an oxygen tank. He feels tubes against his arms and skin (or, not technically his own arms; this isn't *him,* after all), and his chest is...tight.

He isn't...in pain. Not immediately. Not physically.

But something within him *aches* and *burns,* and it isn't a physical feeling but rather, something much, much deeper than that. Something in his heart, in his soul, crushing and hurt and *regret, he feels regret and guilt and pain and I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry…*

The door of the bedroom opens and in runs a young kid. He has bedraggled brown hair and can't be older than thirty, so, late twenties, perhaps. Maybe even early twenties.

A surge of familiarity surges through this body that isn't his. He knows this person, this boy.

The boy crosses the room and kneels by the bedside, and his eyes are full of hurt and sorrow--and tears, he realizes, upon closer inspection.

A hand that isn't his reaches out and settles itself on the boy's forehead. *"I'm sorry, Aki,"* says a woman's voice--the voice of the person whose body he's in. *"I'm leaving you with all this...with so much…sweetheart..."*

The kid smiles at her. *"It's okay,"* he says, belying the tears that begin to trickle down his cheeks. *"I'm gonna do my damndest to beat All For One, I promise. I can't..."* There's another moment, and Aki takes in a sharp breath. *"...I can't let him...I can't let him win, not after…"*

He feels an ache, a burn, because, *oh, Aki, I'm so sorry. It was bad enough to lose him and you're losing me, too, and I can't do anything. I'm sorry. I'm so, so sorry, Aki--*

There's a surge of something within him. It isn't pain, but it's strangled and choked and his next breath is a real, painful struggle to draw in. Aki has moved to a stand again, panicked--but a hand reaches out and settles on his forearm to stop him.

"It's alright, sweetheart," the woman's voice says gently. *"There's...nothing you or anyone else can do now. Just...please. For me, for Dai, for everyone, please...do your best to stay alive, sweetie. Even if you can't beat All For One, even if he overpowers you, please...do your best to stay alive."*

Aki blinks at her, and more tears follow--but then, he nods shakily, slipping her hand off his forearm to hold it between both his own.

"I'll make you proud, Sensei," he promises. *"You and Dai both."*

"I know you will," she says, squeezing his fingers weakly. *"Now...remember…"*

Another strangled something within him.

"...Stay alive. If nothing else, just stay...stay alive…"

The last thing he sees is Aki nodding.

Then there's nothing.

Chapter End Notes

im exhausted please take this -throws-

Anyway, I hope you guys enjoyed this!! I'll be talking more about the ex-holders and who is who a little further on, so if you're confused now don't worry, I'll be explaining more later. :D

As always, I'm once again blown away by all your kind words and support!! Thank you all so much for everything you have done, and thank you in advance for everything that is to come! I love you all dearly and your support means the literal world to me. :D

Thanks for reading/commenting! Until next time, go beyond! PLUS ULTRA!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Non-Stop

Chapter Summary

"Non-Stop" from Hamilton

“Every day you fight,
Like you’re running out of time,
Like you’re running out of time.”

Chapter Notes

ART HFDSJDFHK

aygerim-nk

StarArt Incorporation

THANK YOU SO MUCH!!!! :D :D :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Toshinori’s phone dings in the middle of the night.

Groggily, he reaches for it, groping around the nightstand before his fingers finally close around it. He pulls it to him, squinting against the light of the screen. There’s a new message, below a digital clock that reads *2:27AM*.

[Izuku]
Hey, sorry for bugging you, but do you have any jokes?

Toshinori sits up, shaking some of the sleep from his head, and re-reads the message, confused. Izuku is asking for jokes? At this hour? Why is he even *awake?*

[Toshinori]
I could find some. Why?

He waits, becoming more and more awake by the second.

Izuku’s response comes a second later.

[Izuku]
sdhfjsdfk I just looked at the time.
Did I wake you up?

The answer is “yes,” and a part of Toshinori wants to tell him a lie, because something is obviously wrong and Izuku doesn’t need to feel bad for waking him on top of everything else.

But at the same time, he doesn’t want to lie to the kid, so he refrains.

[Toshinori]
Meh, it’s fine. Don’t worry about it.
I texted Nana in the middle of the night, too, while she was mentoring me.
It’s part of the job and I’m happy to be here.
What’s wrong?

[Izuku]
…
I’m thinking.

[Toshinori]
Just saying, if you lie and say you’re alright, I’m not going to believe you.
I know you love jokes and all, but you asking me for jokes is rare.
So you might as well just go ahead and tell me what’s wrong.

There’s a long moment that follows, and Toshinori doesn’t like it. But Izuku’s response *does* indeed come.

[Izuku]
I…have these dreams, sometimes.
…

[IZUKU IS TYPING]

It stays that way for a good five minutes.

[Izuku]
It’s been happening more frequently now. It happened twice over the Sports Festival and twice in the past week.
I…I don’t know what it means or how to stop it. I don’t think I can stop it. And…I don’t know, I just…
Nevermind, forget I even said anything. Goodnight. Sorry for waking you.

[Toshinori]
No
Wait

[IZUKU IS OFFLINE]

Well then.

Without missing a beat, Toshinori closes out of the messenger, finds Izuku's contact in his phone and calls.

It rings. Over, and over, and over again.

There is no answer.

Dammit, kid, Toshinori thinks, dialing again. He waits. The phone rings. He's taken, once again, to Izuku's voicemail.

Toshinori dials again and pulls up the messages on the side-bar.

[Toshinori]
If you don't want to talk about it that's fine. Just say so.
But this is a problem and ignoring me isn't going to help you.
So. Might as well answer me now.

Izuku picks up on the last ring.

Toshinori immediately puts the phone to his ear. He hears rustling and breathing, followed by a sniff or two.

"Izuku," Toshinori says at once, "you there?"

"Y-Yeah, I'm here," Izuku's voice comes, and it's thick and cracks in several places, even through the phone. *"S-Sorry, I-I didn't look at the time before texting you. I shouldn't have said anything."*

Toshinori's heart seizes in his chest, not because of Izuku's words, but rather, because of the way he says him.

He sounds almost like he's in pain.

He sounds like he's been crying.

"Kiddo," Toshinori says, "I'm glad you said something. Don't feel bad about it, alright? It's okay."

Izuku forces a hoarse, shaky laugh, and Toshinori wishes he wouldn't. *"Y-Yeah, okay...sorry, it never* dawned *on me how early it--"*

“Izuku, your jokes are hilarious, but if you’re using them to evade the problem here, then I’d really rather you didn’t.”

If the silence means anything, Toshinori hit the nail right on the head. Izuku says nothing; Toshinori hears rustling, more sniffs, and the jingle of a bell.

“...What’s wrong?” Toshinori finally asks.

There’s a long moment.

“...L-Like I said in the text,” Izuku’s voice comes back, choked and strained, *“it’s, it’s...I just, I have…”*

He pauses. Toshinori hears a long inhale of breath. “I’m listening, kiddo,” Toshinori says gently. “Take your time.”

Izuku does, and it does take time, and Toshinori waits through it all.

“...I have these, these dreams,” Izuku stammers, and it’s weird, hearing Izuku so broken when he’s usually so confident. *“They’re...I-I...h-how do I put this...t-they aren’t n-nightmares, and-and they aren’t even really d-dreams at all, they’re--t-they’re memories, I-I think.”*

“Memories,” Toshinori repeats to himself, thinking. “...Your memories? The USJ?”

There’s another broken, shaky laugh. *“That’d be easier, if they were my memories,”* he chokes. *“B-But they--they’re not.”*

Toshinori pauses. “...Do you mean…”

“The ex-holders,” Izuku gasps. *“The ex-holders of One For All, it’s...it’s their memories, t-their--”* There’s a pause. He chokes a sob, and when his voice comes back, it’s more desperate and strained than ever before. *“T-Toshinori-san, I-I--”*

“Take a breather, my boy,” Toshinori says. “Breathe for a second, okay? Calm down.”

He wishes he was there. He has this mental image of Izuku, sitting on whatever bed Gran has given him, clutching his phone and sobbing, and the image strikes him to the core and he wishes he’d never even thought of it.

“I-I’m okay,” Izuku’s voice comes back, slightly less strangled than before. *“I-I’m--oof!--H-Howler, w-what--”* There’s more rustling, and

Izuku laughs shortly. The laughter is weak and broken, but it's real. *"Howler, you goofball, I-I'm okay, I promise--"*

Toshinori smiles a little, too. Thank goodness for that dog. "You okay, kid?"

"Y-Yeah, s-sorry, I think I spooked Howler a little," Izuku says, and his tone is significantly lighter than before. *"He jumped on me. He's been...h-he's been able to tell when I'm upset lately. It--Howler* s-s-stop, *your breath smells--"*

Toshinori smiles again. He isn't there, but he's glad Izuku isn't alone.

The conversation has changed for the better now, so he doesn't bring Izuku back to the dreams he'd mentioned. He's curious, concerned, and he knows he'll always be, but he can't bring himself to drag Izuku back down there when the subject has changed.

"...Toshinori-san, I-I--"

"You don't have to tell me now," Toshinori cuts in. "There will be time for that later, if you would like to share. Right now, though...just, try to get some sleep, alright? Gran's gonna push you to your limits, you need all the sleep you can get tonight."

"Y-Yeah, y-you're...you're right," Izuku says, and his tone has dropped, just a little. *"I-I just, c-could...n-nevermind, f-forg--"*

"Izuku. What is it?"

"C-Could you...stay on the phone with me, for a while?" Izuku's voice is soft, embarrassed. *"I-I mean, j-just for a little while--"*

"Yeah," Toshinori answers, without hesitation; he's wide awake now, and sleep is a distant thought to him at this point. "I'll stay up with you as long as you need me to, my boy."

Izuku makes a choked sound, somewhere between a laugh and a sob. *"T-Thanks. I-I just...I-I don't think I can fall asleep yet, a-after…"*

"That's fine," Toshinori says, scooting back and leaning against the headboard of the bed. "I get it. You don't have to explain it to me right now. Some other time, okay?"

"O-Okay…"

"So. Jokes?"

“Y-Yes.”

“Let me think…” He leans back, in it for the long haul. “...You’ve probably heard all of them, haven’t you?”

“T-That’s okay, i-it’s--it’s a distraction.”

“Right, right, gotcha…” He pulls up his browser on his phone. “Give me a second, I’m finding some.”

“Ok-kay.”

Toshinori doesn’t have to do much searching; he finds an article called *“Worst 100 Dad Jokes”* and, within moments, finds a few he thinks Izuku would like.

“Do you like jokes about construction?”

“C-Construction…?”

“Nevermind, I’m still working on it.”

“You--oh my gosh. Oh. My gosh…”

Toshinori can’t help the smile that spreads over his face. “You of all people have no right to use that tone of voice at a joke,” he says. “Anyway...oh, I’ve got one. I think you’re gonna appreciate this.”

“Oh boy.”

“What do ghosts have for breakfast?”

“Boo-berries.”

“...Well, it says here the answer is ‘scream of wheat’--”

“They ain’t ghosts, what do they know.”

“--But I like yours better.”

“Heck yeah, validation.”

“Oh, here’s one--words cannot express how limited my vocabulary is.”

There’s a beat.

“Words can’t--oh, pfft.”

Toshinori hears an odd sound--an odd mixture of something between a whine and a groan, but louder and more drawn out.

“Oh my gosh, Howler literally just howled at you. He disapproves.”

“I believe Howler just summed up how most everyone feels when they hear your jokes, my boy.”

“Fair.”

This goes on for a very long time, Toshinori finding and telling jokes, Izuku (and sometimes Howler) making comments on said jokes, back and forth in a calm, set rhythm.

And then Izuku stops responding.

Toshinori waits a while. He doesn’t hear anything; some shifting, maybe, and breathing, but that’s all.

“Kiddo?” Toshinori asks, quietly, just in case his suspicion is correct.

The lack of response tells him that it is. Izuku has fallen asleep.

He smiles, then pulls back his phone for a moment to look at the digital clock. *4:21,* apparently; he was talking to Izuku for nearly two hours.

He puts the phone against his ear again. “Howler?”

He hears rustling.

“Take care of Izuku for me, okay?”

There’s a tiny little *boof*-- somehow, the dog must know that Izuku is asleep and that too much noise will wake him. Toshinori waits another ten minutes, should Izuku wake up, and when he doesn’t, Toshinori whispers an unheard *goodnight* and terminates the call.

He turns up the volume on his phone all the way, then settles back and tries to sleep again.

My boy sleeps now.

He hurts for others. He’s full of hurt but he’s also full of love and it’s because he loves that he hurts so much.

But there are people who love him too. The old boy he talks to sometimes loves him. My boy's friends who he worries about and hurts for love him, and they hurt for him too, just like he hurts for them.

It will go like this. It will continue to go on like this. My boy will love and hurt, and my boy's friends will love and hurt. It will keep going like this and it will never end.

But they do not hurt alone. I am here with my boy, and my boy is with his friends, and my boy's friends are with my boy. They will continue to hurt but they will continue to love, and their love will help through their hurt.

I love my boy. I will keep my boy safe.

Izuku wakes up slowly.

It's not that the process of actually waking up takes a long time--it's more that, as he drags his clothes out of his suitcase and gets dressed, he feels unbelievably sluggish. He'd woken up with Howler laying on top of him, his phone resting on his chest, and he feels no more awake than he did when he first opened his eyes than he does now, splashing water on his face in the bathroom sink.

When he thinks about it, he retreats into the bedroom and finds his phone. The battery is low (he'd left his applications running, dangit), so he puts it on the charger, then sits on the edge of the bed and sends a message to Toshinori.

[Izuku]
Thanks for last night. That really helped.
Sorry for falling asleep on you ehrjkskfdf.

The response comes almost immediately.

[Toshinori]
Don't mention it, kiddo.
And it's fine. I'm glad you got some sleep.
How are you now?

[Izuku]
Exhausted but okay.
Pray for me today. We're working on OFA.

[Toshinori]
My deepest condolences. Try not to die too much.

[Izuku]
:D
: D

[Toshinori]
Ohhh boy.
Good luck!

[Izuku]
I appreciate.

[Toshinori]
:)
[emoji.skull_crossbones] [emoji.flower_bouquet]

[TOSHINORI IS OFFLINE]

[Izuku]
HEY YOU CAN'T DO THAT AND RUN OFF.
H O W D A R E

There isn't a response, so he lets go, leaving his phone on the nightstand and heading downstairs with Howler hot on his heels.

Gran Torino is already awake, sitting on the couch like he's pouting. He raises his head at Izuku with a look caught somewhere between a frown and a smirk.

"So you're finally awake," he says, hopping off the couch. "Good. I was starting to get worried."

Izuku frowns. "What time is it…?"

"Nearly noon."

Izuku's eyes widen. "W-Wait, you let me sleep in--!"

Gran Torino grabs his cane. "Wasn't me, boy," he says, pointing the cane at Howler, standing innocently at Izuku's side. "He wouldn't stop growling at me when I tried waking you up. Since he's a service dog, figured I'd listen to 'im."

"Oh," Izuku says, quietly, looking down at Howler for a moment. The dog looks at him, tongue lolling out of his mouth. He looks innocent enough. "...Thanks, Gran Torino."

"Don't thank me yet," Gran says. "So, tell me…" He turns and heads

into the kitchen, beckoning for Izuku to follow, “did you have any time to think about One For All?”

“I-I thought about it, a little,” Izuku answers; Grab hands him a plate, which he sets on the little dining table. “But, I mean...I don’t know what I’m doing wrong, y’know?”

Gran lets out a huge sigh. “Well, suppose it makes sense,” he says, handing Izuku a second plate. “Don’t worry about it too much, you’ll get it eventually. Ya ain’t leavin’ until you can use that power without breaking your arms.”

“True, true,” says one of the ex-holders, and Izuku jumps, a little startled. *“The breaking arms thing is gettin’ old, boyo. The old man’s right.”*

“Fair enough,” Izuku says, both to the ex-holder and to Gran Torino as he sets the second plate on the table. “So, yesterday, when we were talking about it--you mentioned me having a head start, since I’m used to using One For All as a ghost.”

“Yep.”

“What did you mean by that?”

“Hell if I know,” Gran Torino says, opening the freezer tossing Izuku a box of something. Izuku scrambles to catch it. “Either way, it ain’t good to work on an empty stomach. Heat those up in the microwave, would ya?”

Izuku looks down at the box. “...Aren’t taiyakis a dessert?”

“Yep,” Gran Torino says, taking his seat at the breakfast table. “Sugar’s good when you’re in a slump.”

Izuku frowns at him. “I’m not in a slump.”

“Yes you are. Go ahead and get to it, boy. We’ll work on One For All afterwards.”

Izuku sighs, but tears open the box anyway and dumps a decent amount of frozen taiyakis onto another plate.

While the microwave does its job, Izuku stands back, thinking.

I’m thinking about One For All the wrong way, Izuku recounts, frowning. *I’m thinking of it as something it isn’t.*

There's a reason I break my bones, but what?

"One For All isn't special," but what does that mean?

He takes in a breath to calm himself, then starts from scratch.

At its core…

What is *One For All?*

He frowns to himself. The voices in his head are completely silent now, offering no tips, and while a part of him is glad they're letting him figure this out instead of giving him all the answers, the other part of him really, *really* wants said answers.

…One For All, at its core…

…Is a Quirk.

But what am I doing wrong?

The microwave dings, and he grabs a hand towel and carries the plate to the table.

"Ah, here we go!" Gran Torino says, looking like an elated child at an amusement park as he snatches a taiyaki from the plate. "You'll have plenty of time to think about One For All later. For now, sit back and enjoy a piping hot--"

He bites into it. Izuku is *sure* he hears an audible clang.

"OY!" Gran Torino snaps. "They're still frozen!"

"What?" Izuku says, frowning. "But, I set them for the right time and everything--"

"You must've done *something* wrong!" Gran Torino says sharply, tossing the mostly frozen taiyaki back on his plate. "What'd you do!?"

"Nothing!" Izuku says, inspecting the microwave. "I just did what the instructions said--!"

"You can't just *cram* the plate in there willy-nilly!" Gran Torino says, hopping off his chair and making his way over. "That's what you did wrong! If the microwave can't turn, the heat can't get distributed properly! What, have you never used a microwave before?"

“Sorry!” Izuku says, shaking his head. “My mom and I don’t have the turning type, so--!”

He stops.

The heat can’t distribute…?

It clicks. He realizes what he’s been doing wrong.

“Hey, wait!” He takes a step back, running his hands through his hair and letting out a giddy kind of laugh. “I-I think I figured it out, Gran Torino!”

Gran Torino frowns at him. “Figured what out? The microwave?”

“No, One For All!” Izuku says, still grinning, completely enthralled by this assessment. “I get it now! When it comes to One For All…”

He crosses the room to the dining table and raises a taiyaki for Gran Torino to see.

“I’m like a taiyaki!” Izuku says enthusiastically.

He realizes how crazy that sounds the moment the words finish leaving his mouth.

Gran Torino gives him this incredigious look. “No you’re not. Are you okay?”

“Nonono, I mean, when it comes to the heat distribution!” Izuku elaborates, setting the pastry back down and looking down at his hands. It takes him a second to gather his thoughts, but when he’s done, everything makes so much more sense.

“When I used One For All as a ghost that first time, at the USJ,” Izuku begins slowly, “it was completely subconscious. I just, fired it up on a whim because of how desperate I was. And that’s how everyone else does it. The people who were born with Quirks use their Quirks just like they use their hands. But for me...for someone born without that...whenever I use One For All physically...I overthink it. I treat it like it’s something special and not just another physical part of me.”

“Bingo.” Gran Torino grins at him. “And now that you *know* this about yourself…now that you *know* you’ve been looking at One For All the wrong way…”

“I can correct it!”

“Exactly!” Gran Torino says. “You’ve got it, kid!” He pauses. “...But *why the hell* did you compare yourself to a taiyaki!?”

“Distribution!” Izuku answers, balling his fists and grinning. “When I overthink One For All, I end up concentrating it to only a certain part of my body. But...instead of focusing on my arm, or my leg...what I *should* be doing...is focus on spreading it throughout my entire body...!”

As he speaks, he tries. He shuts his eyes and summons his will with all his might. He feels One For All’s burning warmth in his chest, and the warmth soon spreads throughout him, from the tips of his toes to the tips of his fingers. The sensation is hot, like fire, but not particularly painful. He feels a little stiff, but...he can do it.

“Whoo!”

“Yeah, high-fives!”

“Way to go, kiddo!”

“HELL YEAH, THAT’S MY BOY!!”

“Whoop whoop!”

“You’ve got this, kid!”

“Make us proud!”

Gran Torino’s confusion is replaced with another grin. “Gotta say, kid,” he says, crouching low to the ground, “comparing One For All to taiyakis in a microwave is pretty boring. You sure you’re okay with that?”

“I mean,” Izuku says, smirking, “I don’t see *watt’s* wrong with it.”

“Tch.” Gran Torino’s grin only grows, and he rolls his eyes for a moment. “If you think you can move in that state,” he says, “then what do you say we go for another round, boy?”

Izuku nods immediately. “Yeah,” he says, balling his fists. “Come at me with everything you’ve got!”

Izuku’s back slams into the wall, and he crumples to the floor a second later, every inch of him aching someway or another. Howler is at his side in an instant; he’d been growling at Gran Torino the past fifteen

or so minutes, but didn't attack on Izuku's command.

Izuku sits up shakily, palms braced against the ground. "I'm alright, boy," he says, reaching out and scratching behind Howler's ears. He raises his head towards Gran Torino, standing a little ways away. "Another round."

"Nah," Gran Torino says, waving his hand. "That was already round four, boy. We're taking a break."

"But I have to improve," Izuku says, then lets out an *oof* when Howler promptly lays on top of his legs. "Howler, why--"

Howler looks at him, then lays his head down. Gran Torino exhales sharply through his nose and shakes his head.

"Guess the dog is finally siding with me," Gran Torino says, smirking. "I get that you wanna learn all you can while you're here, boy, but if you burn yourself out, it's gonna do more harm than good. Besides--"

He grabs his cane off the ground again. Izuku *really* doesn't think he needs it, but anyway.

"--If you fight me all the time, you'll start developing bad habits," Gran Torino goes on. "Bad habits are hard to break when it comes to fighting, so it's best we don't let any develop. We'll do a few more practice rounds later on, but after that…"

Izuku bites his lip, but nods. That makes sense. He looks down at the medical bracelet on his wrist, which somehow was durable enough to survive all of Gran Torino's hits.

It reminds Izuku of something, though.

"...Hey, so, um...about my Quirk, 'Dissociate'..."

"Yeah?"

"While I'm here," Izuku says, raising his head, "could you teach me some hand to hand combat?"

"Hand to hand combat, aye?" Gran Torino asks, then turns away, humming to himself. "Yeah, 'suppose that's always a good thing to know. Any reason specifically why you wanna focus on hand to hand, boy?"

"Yeah." Izuku rests his forearms on Howler's back casually. "Back at

the USJ, when I was fighting Shigaraki, I used Dissociate for surprise attacks, but all I really did was punch him and kick him a few times. It would've been nice to have had some actual technique."

"Right," Gran Torino says, nodding. "And at the Sports Festival, too, when you went at that Todoroki kid, kickin' and punchin'."

"Yeah," Izuku says. "So, along with One For All, do you think you could help me?"

"I'll do what I can," Gran Torino answers, leaning both hands on his cane. "We don't got that much time to work with, but I can teach ya the basics. Everything else, you can go over with Toshinori. I taught him most of what he knows, hopefully *some of it* got through that thick skull of his…"

Izuku cracks a smile. *So that's why Toshinori-san was scared of him…*

"So, how do you feel?" Gran Torino asks. "Using One For All like this, I mean."

"It feels…" Izuku pauses a moment to think. "...It's hard to keep up, Full Cowl, but...with a little more practice, I think I can do it. Using One For All like this is really...it's freeing, if that makes sense."

"I bet it is," Gran Torino agrees, nodding. "Gotta be nice to be able to use a bit of your power without blowing up your own bones, right?"

Izuku smiles faintly and nods--and then--

"He's got a point."

"True, true…"

--say the voices of the ex-holders in his head, and Izuku recognizes both of them.

The voice of the woman in his latest dream, and the voice of Aki. Presumably, mentor and successor.

Except…

There's someone named "Dai" in between that. A friend of Aki's, someone Aki and his mentor both knew.

Someone who'd died.

Immediately, Izuku is slammed into by what he'd seen last night. He'd tried putting it out of his mind all day so far, but...with all this talk of One For All, not to mention the voices in his head…

"Hey, kid, you alright?"

"O-Oh, yeah, I'm fine," Izuku says; Howler's nose is pressed against his chest. He didn't even notice until now. "Sorry, just...lost in thought, I guess."

Gran Torino gives him an unconvinced look, but doesn't press for more information. "Anyway," he says, turning away with his cane, "I'll give ya some cool-down time, then we'll start going over hand-to-hand combat stuff, alright?"

Izuku nods, both to Gran Torino and to try and chase away the plaguing thoughts of the past holders. "Alright," he agrees, and Gran Torino spins around and continues off.

"I'll bring you some taiyakis so long as that dog doesn't try taking my calves off again!"

"Thanks!"

"We're doing what now?"

"Like I said, you'll start developing bad habits if you keep fighting me!" Gran Torino says, hopping down the final steps leading from his porch to the sidewalk. "We're headed to a city a little ways from here, take down some petty villains, give ya some more field experience."

"W-Wait." Izuku finishes securing the last latch to lock the house, checks the knob to make sure, then hops down the steps after Gran Torino with Howler hot on his heels, wearing his service dog vest. "Already? Even though I only just now started using One For All like this…?"

"You'll be *fine,"* Gran Torino says, waving a hand at him idly. "Believe me, this is gonna be a huge leap for you, taking on villains. Besides, it's not like it's something you've never done before, right?"

"Well, I mean, yeah," Izuku says, following Gran Torino down the sidewalk, "but what about Howler?"

"I already spoke with a friend of mine who's gonna look after him

while we're busy," Gran Torino answers simply. "Up until that point, you shouldn't have a hard time taking the dog on the train, since he's a registered service animal."

"But--"

"But nothing," Gran Torino says, raising a hand; a taxi pulls over by the curb at his signal. "C'mon, we don't have time to waste."

They take the taxi to the train station, then take the train towards their destination. By now, the sun has set, and Izuku looks out the window and watches the city lights zoom by outside.

Howler is laying at Izuku's feet, sleeping, and Izuku leans his head against the window, watching the city pass by.

Overhead, a woman's voice on the intercon chirps, *"Ladies and gentlemen, we will be pulling into Hosu City in just a few minutes. Please have your things ready to go when we arrive."*

So we're passing through Hosu, Izuku thinks, glancing down at the phone held between his gloved hands. He'd sent another message to Iida recently, but Iida hadn't responded. *...This is where Iida picked his agency. Hosu City…*

Izuku bites his lip. His message to Iida has shown up as "Read," but there isn't a response, which is worrying, to say the least. Iida is almost infamous for how quickly he's able to respond to his classmates' texts, and now…

"What are you doing on that phone, boy?" Gran Torino asks, and Izuku jumps.

"A friend of mine," Izuku answers, darkening his screen and stuffing his phone into the back pocket of his hero costume. "He's interning in Hosu City, so I was just thinking about hi--"

The train gives a sudden lurch which *almost* throws Izuku from his seat. Howler's head snaps up immediately, and a couple passengers *are* sent flying, catching themselves on the backs of seats and on the windowsills.

The woman's voice comes back over the intercon.

"We are experiencing some technical difficulties. Please remain in your

seats."

Technical--? Izuku thinks--and that's the only thing he has *time* to think.

The wall of the train a couple rows ahead of Izuku and Gran Torino explodes, sending civilians flying back and scrambling to get away in a rush of panic and a flurry of movements. Izuku shuts his eyes against the smoke and dust, then opens them again a second later.

There's a Nomu standing outside the gaping hole of the train's metal wall, brains exposed, eyes bulging. Clawed hands tear the metal wall open further, making a bigger hole for itself--

It's trying to get in--!

"Stay back, kid!" Gran Torino shouts, and a second later he's gone, and a blur of yellow slams into the Nomu and sends the both of them flying out the train.

Izuku is on his feet in an instant, rushing over to the hole with Howler hot on his heels. "Gran Torino!" he shouts, swinging himself over the debris from the wreck just in time to watch Gran Torino slam the Nomu into the side of a building. They disappear in a cloud of smoke and dust, and Izuku stares in horror, every part of him going numb.

The voices in his head are going rapid-fire, everyone shouting and talking at once (most are exclamations of horror, and Nana is yelling at Gran, he thinks), but Izuku tunes most of it out.

A Nomu.

A Nomu, like the ones from the USJ. This one was a lot smaller than the one Izuku had been slammed into the ground by way back when, but even so. A Nomu. Shigaraki's inhuman monster.

And it's here in Hosu City.

Izuku grits his teeth. "C'mon, boy, we're making a lil' detour," Izuku says, and he hooks an arm under Howler and, without looking back, he leaps out the gaping hole in the wall.

Howler doesn't struggle, and Izuku doesn't falter. His feet hit the ground of a rooftop as the voices of the civilians on the train screaming at him to come back fade out of his ears, and he fires up One For All (Full Cowl) and takes off running across the rooftop.

Gran Torino…

…A Nomu…

Izuku grits his teeth. He makes sure he has a secure hold on his dog and then leaps to another rooftop. The landing is a bit rougher this time; he skids and *almost* takes the dive off the side of the roof, but stops himself in the nick of time.

Even with what little power I have…

…There has to be something I can do!

When he's done rooftop-hopping and his feet are on solid ground, he takes off down the sidewalks. Howler keeps up with him, running, and Izuku's teeth are gritted behind his lips, and his fists are balled at his sides, swinging back and forth as he runs with all his might.

Hosu City is in *flames.*

Buildings are engulfed with infernos, and smoke fills the sky and settles like a giant canopy above the city. Embers and growing flames paint the smoky sky with oranges and yellows and reds, and the sound of screaming civilians and crunching metal fills Izuku's ears and heart.

Dammit, how did this happen? he thinks, teeth still gritted, legs still pounding while One For All and adrenaline burn through his veins like poison. *Gran Torino…Iida…wherever you are…*

He keeps running.

…Please be okay--!

He turns a corner abruptly, just in time to watch a massive explosion blast several already-fighting pro heroes off their feet.

Izuku's arms go up to shield his face, and he coughs and chokes against the smoke that flies at him. Howler is still at his side, and when Izuku raises his head, he sees them.

Three of them.

Nomus, *plural.*

They're surrounded by a group of pro heroes who are trying (and mostly failing) to hold them off. The heroes, all with different Quirks

and abilities, are giving everything they've got against these monsters, but…

"Hey, kid, get out of here!" one of the pros shouts at him, swinging her arm in his direction. "This isn't the place for you, you need to--!"

A winged Nomu drops an entire car onto another, and an explosion follows. Izuku shields his face with his arms again, smoke and dust and debris flying everywhere.

"Go! Now!" the pro tells him again, more forcefully this time, before taking off towards the Nomus alongside the rest of the heroes.

There isn't anything Izuku can do in this situation that would help anything--the most he'd do is get in the heroes' way--so he turns on his heel and starts off.

"Tenya!"

The shout stops Izuku dead in his tracks, and he looks over his shoulder. One of the heroes--the pro hero, "Manual," Izuku recalls--is shouting, looking around frantically in between fighting off a persistent Nomu.

"Tenya!" Manual calls again, eyes wide despite the smoke and dust engulfing the entire area. *"Tenya, where are you!?"*

Izuku's eyes go wide. *Iida isn't here…? At a time like this, when Hosu City is in such a--*

His train of thought derails.

Hosu City…

His ears begin to ring.

…Iida…

His heart pounds viciously against his chest.

…The Hero Killer…

It all clicks, in one sure, solitary instant.

…Don't tell me…!

He spins around again and *runs* as fast as he can, feet slamming the

asphalt in time with his racing heart. Howler runs alongside him, just barely keeping up, and the voices in Izuku's head are talking again but he tunes them out with practiced ease.

Iida…

Izuku heads downtown, towards the more abandoned part of Hosu City. Stain's victims were always found in places where there weren't many people, where they wouldn't be found. While Izuku feels horror and fear at the thought of his friend coming in contact with this villain--at the thought of his friend *going after* this villain--a lot of what he feels, right now, as he runs…

…Is *pain.*

…Iida, why would you--!

There's a yank in his chest. A physical yank and tug and pull, and it slams him to a stop, the soles of his shoes scraping the ground.

It's a feeling like before. He's *had this exact feeling before,* back at the USJ, during the final stretch of the fight while All Might stood, bluffing his strength at Shigaraki and Kurogiri once the Nomu had been defeated.

A death omen.

This feeling is a *death omen--*

A scream splits the silence in his head, and Izuku whirls around towards the sound.

There are two children, young, a boy and a girl. The boy is unconscious; the girl is crying, screaming, and dragging the him backwards desperately.

A Nomu drops from the rooftop and hits the ground right in front of them.

And then there's another yank in Izuku's chest. A real, physical thing.

No…

…No way, you're…

…You're kidding me…

Three death omens.

Iida's, and these two kids'.

The girl screams again as the Nomu advances. Different yanks almost *physically* pull Izuku in different directions, and his mind is going all over the place. Iida. These kids. Iida. These kids.

He can't…

How is he supposed to choose--

The girl trips and falls back with a shriek, arms clutching the unconscious boy's desperately. The Nomu moves towards them, lets out a howl, and the girl screams again, tears streaming down her cheeks.

Izuku grits his teeth, then spins on his heel and runs at the Nomu.

If I hurry…

He balls his fists tighter.

…I can save them all.

I have *to save them all!*

"HEY, STUPID!" Izuku shouts, cupping his hands around his mouth. The Nomu's head snaps around to look at him, and the girl's screaming comes to an abrupt, confused halt. "IF YOU'RE AS SMART AS YOU ARE UGLY, THEN YOU'RE A *GENIUS!"*

There's a noticeable beat before the Nomu screeches at him, loud and long and furious. The girl clamps her hands around her head with a shrill shriek that breaks off quickly, and Izuku barely even flinches, resolve set.

He ignores the yanks in his chest, the voices in his head.

He runs at the Nomu and, the moment the Nomu opens its mouth to clamp down on his head, Izuku dissociates.

His body hits the ground in an unmoving heap, and the Nomu has only a split second to be confused before Izuku phases through him with his spirit. The Nomu shrinks backwards with a shriek, writhing and shaking its head. While it's distracted, Izuku zips back into his body, balls his fist, and punches the Nomu from underneath its chin.

The Nomu shrieks and flies backwards, shaking its head to clear away the pain. Izuku moves to stand between it and the children behind him; Howler is with the kids, Izuku knows, and he trusts Howler to look after them while he takes care of this.

Izuku grins. “Aww, that hurt, didn’t it?” he says.

The Nomu fixes its eyes on him, almost like it understands that it’s being taunted.

“Well you know what also hurts!?” Izuku questions, and he takes off again, One For All roaring to life. “Freaking *dying!”*

The Nomu is slow, but its moments are swooping. Izuku ducks out of the way when it lashes out at him with a claw, then gets his feet underneath him and fires off a punch at five percent, the amount of power he can use without breaking his arm. The Nomu flies backwards, smashing against the side of a building and landing in a heap on the cracked, torn asphalt.

There’s a crack. This part of the city is old and abandoned; rightfully, it should be torn down, or at least blocked off, just for the safety of passing civilians--like the little girl and boy, for example.

The building isn’t stable, and the Nomu’s bashing into that made it even less so. Izuku is gritting his teeth so hard that his head is beginning to pound, but he doesn’t dare relax.

He has a plan. It’s stupid and reckless but it’s a plan.

“Hey, why not come at me, huh!?” Izuku questions, spreading his arms. “So far all I’ve done is come at you, so what say you stop being a coward and face me head-on!?”

The Nomu screeches at him furiously, then launches itself forward. Izuku waits for the right timing--then, he slides beneath the Nomu’s mid-air body, pulls back his finger with his thumb, and fires off a blast at full power.

He isn’t aiming for the Nomu.

He’s aiming for the building.

The blast hits its target; there’s a *creak* and a *crack* as dust flies everywhere and chunks of cement begin to fall from the building. Izuku is being yanked and pulled all over the place, and his middle

finger is broken, but it doesn't matter; he's fought with broken fingers before, he'll live, and anyway, the building is already coming down, all that's left is--

The Nomu's swinging arm catches him in the ribs and flings him.

Izuku slams back-first into a crumbling wall, which gives way upon his impact against it. He tumbles to the ground inside the abandoned building, ribs burning, coughs tearing his throat.

A loud *thud* nearby tells him that the Nomu is coming for him once again, and Izuku scrambles to his feet looking around wildly.

There are two pillars holding up the majority of the building's weight.

Wellp.

He has another stupid idea.

The Nomu crashes through the hole in the wall just as Izuku makes a break for one of the two pillars. The Nomu's screech of rage makes his head pound, but he doesn't let it slow him down.

It's taking too long.

He runs and the Nomu chases him.

I'm taking too long.

There's one yank at his chest now and it's stronger than ever before.

Iida--

Hold on--!

He runs at the pillar and, at the very last second, when the pillar is inches from his face and he feels the Nomu's breath at his neck, he ducks and dives to the side with a kick off the ground with Full Cowl.

The kick sends Izuku a considerable distance away, and he hits the ground just as the Nomu slams into the pillar. It cracks and breaks upon impact.

And then the roof begins to cave, just like Izuku knew it would.

He's already right by the far wall when chunks of cement begin raining down from the ceiling, and he scrambles back to his feet and

books it, diving out of one of the cracked windows nearby.

He hits the ground tumbling, but he gets his feet underneath him quickly and crouches, just in case it isn't enough.

It is.

The building collapses over the Nomu, and its last shriek of pain and fear rings through Izuku's ears like a booming gong.

The dust stings Izuku's eyes but he can't bring himself to look away for a long, long time.

And then he can, and he gets up again and runs back to the boy and girl and Howler.

The girl raises her head when she sees him coming, still holding the boy close to her (her brother, Izuku assumes; the resemblance between them makes this point rather obvious). The boy is conscious now, hugging her tightly, and she's hugging him back equally tightly.

"Are you okay?" Izuku asks, kneeling by them; the girl nods shakily, and a second later, the boy does the same. "Are either of you hurt?" The boy had been unconscious a second ago, but he seems alright now; maybe he'd fainted. The girl and boy nod again in response.

"Alright…"

The yank in Izuku's chest is stronger than before. He's out of time.

"Howler," Izuku says, beckoning the dog over, and he runs a hand over his head. "Stay with them, okay? I'll be back, I promise."

Izuku doesn't know why, but he gets the feeling Howler knows exactly what he's talking about. He looks at the kids again, who have stopped hugging and are now staring at him with wonder and awe.

Izuku smiles at them both. "I'll be back," he says. "There's someone else who needs me. I'm gonna leave Howler with you, okay? He'll look after you."

Howler steps forward and nuzzles the boy's face with his nose, and the boy beams at the dog first, then at Izuku. The girl reaches out and strokes Howler's fur.

It isn't ideal. Izuku doesn't want to leave them. But he is really, really, *really* out of time here. The yank is stronger than ever before and he

doesn't know what it means but he doesn't trust it one bit.

Iida's life is on the line. Heck, Iida might already be *dying.*

Izuku takes one last look. Howler sits himself down between the girl and the boy, letting them pet him although his head is raised vigilantly, and Izuku finally tears himself away and takes off down the sidewalk again.

He doesn't look back.

He can't afford to look back.

Iida--

Please…

…Please, Iida…

…Don't…

He's running.

He's scared, I felt his fear. He's afraid because his friend is in danger. He's afraid because he doesn't want to lose the people he loves, and he loves his friends. He's scared.

I want to go with him. I need *to go with him. I said I would protect him and I want to protect him. I need to protect him.*

But he told me to stay. He told me to stay and help these not-friends, and I will because even though my boy is not friends with these new people, he still loves them. He saved them, and he told me to stay with them.

So I will stay with them. It will make my boy sad if something happens to them. It will hurt him very much.

My boy said he will be back, and he will be. I know he will be. He doesn't like breaking his promises. He will be back.

He will be back.

He will be back.

Chapter End Notes

Find me on tumblr! :D

Izuku, if he wasn't so worried about Iida: "Guess you could say I *brought down the house.* :D"

And it's all gone to heck! :D

As always, thank you all so much for everything you do for me and supporting my stories. I loev you all dearly and I hope you enjoy this all the way through!! The next chapter's gonna be a lot of fun! I'm looking forward to it! :D

: D

: D

CYA THEN! :D For now, go beyond!! PLUS ULTRA!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

[X]

Chapter Summary

:)

Chapter Notes

No art this time around, but a huge thanks to everyone who has done me things!! I love everything so much hejshkjfdf thank you all!! :D

Also, I wanted to add that the official "tag" to all things Dis(a) related is "Izuku is a spooky problem child," which is what I've been using to tag Dis(a) related things. Just in case y'all were wondering!! :D

Enjoy the chapter! I had a lot of fun writing this one. :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tenya is tired.

He's sitting on a chair beside his brother's hospital bed, absentmindedly scrolling through his phone--his news app has a lot to say regarding his brother's situation, regarding the "Hero Ingenium" and the "Hero Killer: Stain," though that's all the news is centered on. The "Hero Ingenium" and the villain who'd maimed him.

Tenya feels like he's separated with reality. "Ingenium" is the name the world knows him by, but to Tenya...yes, he's always admired his brother as a hero, for sure, but...it's much more personal to him.

This isn't "Ingenium" lying on the hospital bed, hooked up with tubes and wires and an oxygen mask.

This is "Tensei." This is Tenya's older brother.

It's late. The sun has long since set, but Tenya isn't ready to go just yet. The doctors will be back any moment to tell him that visitation hours are over, and after that he'll be forced to leave, but he'll push it. He'll be here until they kick him out and he won't leave until then.

Tenya's phone lets off a little chirp, and he jumps, not expecting it. At the top of his screen, his messenger displays the new text.

[Midoriya]
Hey, me again. Just checking in. Wanted to know if y'all needed anything. I'm running by the market so.

Tenya frowns at the message.

[Tenya]
Midoriya, do you have any idea what time it is?
Why are you going out at this hour?
Do not go out at this hour. Go to sleep.

[Midoriya]
That doesn't answer my question. Do you guys need anything?

[Tenya]
You didn't answer mine either.
We're fine. Don't worry about us. It's not something you need to burden yourself with.

[Midoriya]
Who said this is a burden?
And even if it was, that wouldn't change anything.
Don't worry about burdening me, we're friends. If I can help you out, especially now, then, I want to.
So don't be afraid to hit me up if you need something, alright? Or just want someone to talk to.

It's odd, Tenya thinks, that Midoriya is so concerned for him. He supposes if their situations were reversed, he would do the same, but still; Tenya has never had a friend do this for him before, just be there. Actually, he's never had a friend that's as close to him as Midoriya is.

[Tenya]
I will keep that in mind. Thank you, Midoriya.
Now go to bed, seriously. If you continue to text me regardless, I will ignore you.

[Midoriya]
Fair enough. Goodnight. Feel free to wake me up if you need me, I'm leaving my ringer on.

[Tenya]
I will.

(It's a lie; Tenya has no intention of doing that, even if he does *need someone to talk to.)*

[Tenya]
Goodnight.

[Midoriya]
Night

[MIDORIYA IS OFFLINE]

Tenya darkens his screen and sets it off to the side with a long, exhausted sigh.

"Who were you talking to?"

Tenya jumps; his eyes find Tensei's, and although there's more light in his brother's eyes than before, when he was first admitted to the hospital, they're still clouded with pain, exhaustion, and fog from painkillers.

"A friend of mine from U.A.," Tenya answers shortly, making sure to keep his voice low. "Midoriya Izuku. He's been...checking up on me ever since… ever since…" He can't bring himself to say it.

Tensei gets it, though, and he nods with a fragile smile. "I'm glad you have someone looking after you, at least," he says, "y'know, when I can't."

That…

...That hurts.

"So, tell me…" Tensei smiles at him again, slightly less fragile this time. "...What is he like, this 'Midoriya'?"

"...Well…"

"A child in a costume?"

The Hero Killer frowns at him, blades poised to strike at another hero, already on his way to being a victim.

"This doesn't concern you, boy," Stain says, turning back to the hero already on the ground, bleeding. "Leave while you still have the chance. This isn't something you want to get involve--"

"Ingenium!"

Tenya barks the name and it almost physically pains him to do so, but he has Stain's attention now.

"...I...I am the younger brother of a most amazing hero!" Tenya chokes, and memories flood his mind immediately; smiles, laughs, encouragements, his brother telling him to lighten up, ruffling his hair fondly… "A hero *you* attacked!"

Stain turns to him fully and straightens up, longswords dragging the ground on either side of him. "You," he says, stepping towards him. "You're his brother."

It's not a question, merely an observation; Stain knows exactly who he is.

He grits his teeth tighter.

"...My brother was an outstanding hero," Tenya manages, feeling like he's being strangled. "He longed to save people, to do whatever he could...and more than that...he was *my* hero. The person I looked up to more than anything else. He inspired me. And *you…"*

He's feeling a lot of things--despair, pain, *hurt*-- but the thing he feels most prominently is *rage.*

"...You had no right to take that away from him!"

Stain narrows his eyes, but Tenya doesn't back down. He *will not* back down. He's made up his mind; he's had his mind made up ever since he chose Hosu to internship in.

"My name...is Ingenium!" Tenya says, meeting the killer's eyes dead-on. "And I *will* beat you!"

Stain's face does not change.

"So be it. *Die."*

Everything happens too quickly.

On a whim, Tenya charges at the killer, teeth gritted, chest tight. Stain waits for him, swords at the ready, and Tenya isn't thinking, he can't think, not when all he wants to do is *beat him, show him, make him pay, make him regret hurting Tensei, make him* hurt--

"I want you to remember what I said before. About not being alone, I mean. If you need someone to talk to, I'm always here."

Midoriya's voice. A memory.

It stuns him, for a moment, the suddenness of it; and then, he barely recovers his wits in time to dodge out of the way of the Hero Killer's blade.

What...

"You talk of heroes," Stain says, pulling back his sword; he's taking his sweet time, Tenya notices, "but, your brother...no, *both* of you…you're nothing but *fakes."*

Any impact Midoriya's words could have had are lost with another wave of pained, vengeful rage, and Tenya is charging again, he's charging, and in his heart he knows Midoriya is right, and he knows fighting Stain won't do anything, but this is all he can do. This is all he can think to do.

He has to make Stain pay for what he did. He has to. He can't let him get away with all the pain Stain inflicted on his brother--

It's over quickly. Tenya isn't even sure what happened.

He's charging one moment, but then there's a sword in his line of sight and when he moves to dodge, his feet are swept from beneath him, and he hits the ground face-first. A sharp, stabbing pain shoots through his shoulder; Stain's blade pierces his skin and pins him to the ground.

Tenya grits his teeth to keep from crying out; the blade moves, withdrawing, and he tries to get up--but then, he can't move at all. It's like every muscle, every bone, tensed and locked together. He tries to move, tries to fight past it, but he can't.

He's stuck.

He's *trapped.*

"You talk of heroes," Stain tells him, "and yet all you're concerned about here...is saving yourself. That guy, over there…"

Tenya raises his head just enough to look. Stain is pointing to the hero from before, the hero Stain had already wounded. He's alive, it seems, but he's not in good shape.

"...Shouldn't you be worried about saving *him* first?" Stain questions. "Saving *him,* before fulfilling your own selfish desires? The heroes of today's society are only concerned with themselves...money, fame,

fortune...and you, your brother...you're *both* more proof of that."

Tenya grits his teeth so tightly that it begins to hurt his head. He hears Midoriya's words again, closer and realer than before, but he ignores them, eyes burning with tears as he tries in vain to move again.

"I am the one who will purge society of so-called 'heroes,'" Stain goes on, raising and moving his blade until it's hovering right over Tenya's back, right over Tenya's *heart.* "'Heroes' like your brother...and 'heroes' like *you."*

Tenya can't move. He can't do *anything.* In desperation, in pain, in anger, the tears break free.

"Say whatever you want!" Tenya strains, voice breaking and cracking. *"You're still just a criminal who hurt my brother!"*

Stain meets his eyes for a moment.

"IIDA!!"

Something drops right on top of the Hero Killer from a reasonably high distance up, and Stain is knocked off his feet, the sword flying from his hand and landing a little ways away.

Stain gets to his feet a second later, springing backwards. "Someone else--" he starts--and then, he stops a second later, eyes widening.

Tenya's eyes widen, too.

On the ground where Stain had been moments before is Midoriya's body, limp, motionless, lifeless.

Tenya knows what this means.

...No…

Stain does *not* know what this means, judging by that look of shock on his face. "What the he--"

Something slams into Stain's face; the killer's neck snaps to the side by the force of the hit, and he springs backwards again, putting more distance between himself, Tenya, and the other hero.

...Midoriya, you can't…

Midoriya's body moves, rising up and standing between Stain and

Tenya, fists moving in front of his face. Stain continues to stare at him, a blade held in each hand, and Midoriya…

Tenya can't see his face. All he sees is Midoriya's back, Midoriya's fists brought up in front of him.

And all he *feels* is a sense of *panic.*

"W-What are you doing here!?" Tenya gasps. "M-Midoriya, *what--"*

"I don't know," Midoriya says, and there's a bite to his tone. "Saving your life, mayhaps, but I could be wrong. Gonna need to get back to you on that when we're not standing ten feet away from a *freaking murderer."*

"M-Midoriya, you can't be here!" Tenya says, louder, more desperate than before. "You have to *go,* get out of here! The Hero Killer, he's--he's *mine! I'm* the one who has to beat him, this doesn't have anything to do with--!"

"Iida."

Midoriya's voice is full of venom.

"...Shut the hell up."

Tenya's breath gets stuck on the lump in his throat.

"If you really think I'd just--I'd just *leave,"* Midoriya says lowly, "...if you really think I'd just, 'Oh yeah, sure, get killed, see if I care,' and pretend I didn't see anything, then why...why are you even *trying* to become a hero? You should know by now, Iida...getting involved in situations like this, when we don't technically *have* to...is the essence of being a hero!"

Tenya's heart fills with lead, but in front of Midoriya, Stain *smiles.*

Stall.

Izuku presses *send* on his phone behind his back. His phone lets out a little cheerful *beep,* and he returns it to his back pocket, focusing his eyes and mind on the hero killer once again.

Stall.

"So you're the Hero Killer," Izuku says, putting his balled fists in front

of his face again. “Your creed, eliminating false heroes, ‘purging’ society…”

Stain nods, almost like he’s expecting Izuku to side with him on this. “Yes,” he says, taking a step forward, dragging his blades with him. “The world is full of heroes who are full of *themselves,* heroes who are only saving people for their own benefit. They’re the scum of society who don’t deserve to--”

“Who don’t deserve to what?” Izuku snaps, and Stain frowns, looking at him quizzically.

Stall. I sent my location to all my contacts…hopefully there’s someone in the area who gets the message…

“Who makes you the arbiter of the world?” Izuku questions. “Who ‘appointed’ you to decide which heroes do and don’t deserve to live? *You?”*

Stain frowns at him. “False heroes will only continue to serve as a menace to society if they are allowed to live,” he says. *Stall.* “They will never change--”

“That’s where you’re wrong,” Izuku interrupts sharply. “People *can* change, but they can’t change if you *kill* them. Society sucks, yeah, believe me I know, but their lives aren’t yours for the taking. They don’t *belong to you.* And, as long as I can…no matter what happens…”

He shifts into a stance--one Gran Torino recently taught him.

“I won’t let you kill them, Stain!”

“Yeah!”

“You tell him, kiddo!”

“You’ve got this!”

Stall.

Stall.

Until help comes…

…Just hang in there.

He runs at Stain, balled fists swinging back and forth. He’s angry at

Iida, really, *really* angry, but he can deal with that later. Whatever he has to say to Iida, all the words he wants to tell him…

…It'll have to wait.

He leaps at Stain as the Hero Killer swings his giant sword out at him. Izuku meets his eyes, teeth gritted, heart pumping and pounding against his chest.

I thought learning some hand to hand combat would be nice for the future, Izuku thinks, gritting his teeth, *but I had no idea I would have to use it so suddenly, let alone against the* Hero Killer--

Stain's blade swings at him, and Izuku dissociates.

His body drops beneath the villain's blade like a sack of rocks; Stain's eyes widen for a moment in shock, but Izuku doesn't stop. He doesn't have time to do much else, so he balls his fist and socks Stain in the jaw.

Hand to hand combat is a lot easier when he's invisible.

Stain leaps backwards, swinging his blade at the blank, empty space; Izuku zips back into his body and kicks out a leg, his heel barely missing Stain's shin. Stain's blade swings; Izuku leaps out of the way this time, back in his body and feeling a bit out of place inside of it.

"You know," Izuku says, straightening up, "what say we *blade* each other farewell and end this?"

Stain blinks. "What did you say."

"You heard what I said," Izuku says, still grinning. Any time he can stall is precious in this situation. "I mean, it's been *knife* fighting and all, and stuff like this is right up my *alley,* but--"

Stain swings at him, and Izuku drops his body beneath the sword, barely missing him. As a ghost, he phases through Stain; Stain lets out a strangled, confused noise, and Izuku immediately zooms back into his body and gets his feet underneath him. Stain is a little ways away now, still holding his longswords.

It's only a matter of time before Stain figures out that it's actually my Quirk, Izuku thinks. *Until then, though, quick, true attacks are the way to go. Distract--*

His bones and muscles tense and lock suddenly, all in one accord, and suddenly, Izuku can't move. Even when he tries wiggling his fingers it doesn't work.

What…

He tries moving again. It still doesn't work.

…It must be Stain's Quirk…Iida and the other pro must not be able to move, either, or they would've either run or attacked a long time ago.

But how…?

And then it clicks, when he thinks about the wounds on Iida and Native.

Blood…?

Did he…did Stain cut me, and I just didn't notice? Did he do it right before I phased through him?

Stain turns away. "You know," he says, walking away from Izuku in long strides, "I won't lie when I say that I hate you, but my resolve is the same. Let it not be said that I killed a hero worthy of their title. However…"

Izuku doesn't think; calling to mind his and Shinsou's fight at the Sports Festival, he forcefully yanks his ghost out of his body. It hurts, like it did before, but he's alright. His body is still standing, held up by Stain's paralysis, and Izuku murmurs a quiet, "That is *weird,"* to himself, but then he's moving, and he grabs Stain's discarded longsword off the ground, the one he'd dropped when Izuku dissociated at the start of this fight.

"These two," Stain says, raising his sword over Iida, "need to be--"

"Hey, Stain! Look what I found!"

Stain swings around just in time to meet Izuku's longsword with his own, just like Izuku knew he would. Izuku grins, and he knows Stain can't see him, but still.

"This sword is pretty rad!" Izuku says, pushing the sword in his hand against Stain's. Stain's eyes are wide, focused on the empty space that is Izuku. "You gonna want this back or can I keep it?"

Stain swings his sword-arm and springs backwards, dislodging his and

Izuku's swords. Izuku grins again and, just to be dramatic, fires up just a *tad* bit of One For All--not enough to summon one of the past holders, but enough to make himself visible.

He feels the warmth spread through him like fire, and a second later, his feet are planted on solid ground, a green outline surrounding his form. Stain's eyes fill with shock, and across the alley, so do Native's and Iida's.

"What's the matter?" Izuku asks, swinging Stain's sword and grinning widely. "Never seen a ghost before? Pretty funny, considering you're making them left and right!"

He charges at Stain again.

"I need help," Izuku says under his breath, and wow this sword is heavy and he has no idea what to do with it, really, but it serves as another thing to distract Stain with so he doesn't complain much. "Which of you guys are really good at hand-to-hand? Or, like, making a scene, even?"

"Ooh, I am! Man, it's been so long since I've fought, but I used to take karate! I was pretty good at it, too--"

"I'm *kind of* in a hurry!" Izuku says, parrying against Stain's sword. It does not last long; Stain twists his wrist and a second later, the sword goes flying from Izuku's hands. Stain lunges at him, and Izuku dodges just in time.

"Okay okay, just summon me, then!"

"Which one are you?" Izuku asks, turning and running; his body is still standing, which means the paralysis hasn't worn off it yet, not that he'd expected it to--

"I'm Dai!"

Dai.

Izuku doesn't give himself the chance to be shocked; there isn't much he can do without his physical One For All, and Stain is running at him and he's out of time. He can't let the killer get past him; if Stain gets past him and to Iida and Native, it's game over.

It's bad, though. It's bad and getting worse. Izuku needs time to focus and concentrate if he wants to summon Dai, and he doesn't *have* that

time right now, not when--

A sudden burst of flames catches the corner of his eye.

Izuku dives to the side, and the flames shoot over his head, red and orange and *yikes,* he can feel the heat from here. Stain is forced backwards to avoid getting charred, winding up at the end of the alleyway.

When Izuku realizes what this means, he gets to his feet again and grins over his shoulder. “Cutting it a little close, don’tcha think, Thermostat?”

Todoroki steps forward into the alley, left hand still aflame. “You’re the one who made me late,” he says flatly, moving to stand beside Izuku. “That cryptic message you sent was *very specific.”*

“Thanks,” Izuku says. “I pride myself in my cryptic messages.”

“Todoroki!?” Iida gasps from the ground; Izuku has been ignoring him this entire time (he’s found it easier to tune people out since dealing with seven voices in his head all the time). “Wh...What are you doing here!?”

“So far I could ask you the same thing,” Todoroki answers, eyes on Stain. “I knew it was bad when Midoriya texted me, but how you wound up fighting the Hero Killer is still beyond me.”

“Someone else, then,” Stain says, frowning at them. “I’ll warn you, don’t stand in the way of justice. Those who are for those who are against it may as well be against it themselves.”

“Got a plan?” Todoroki asks Izuku quietly. “What’s the word on Native and Iida?”

“They can’t move,” Izuku reports. “It has to do with Stain’s Quirk and ingesting their blood, I think.”

Todoroki nods stiffly back at him. “Right. Makes sense why none of Stain’s victims were able to fend for themselves for very long, then.”

“We need help,” Izuku says, straightening up alongside Todoroki. “If you buy me some time, I can try summoning a spirit like I did back at the USJ. They should be able to go and get help...and maybe help us tilt the scales some more here.”

Todoroki frowns at him. “You say that so nonchalantly.”

“What?”

“Summoning dead people.”

“Well I mean,” Izuku says, “when you spend so much time being a ghost, it’s not all that weird--”

“I’d advise you stop trying to get in my way,” Stain says, voice cutting through Izuku’s thoughts. “This is the only chance I’ll give you two to back off. If you do not, then...I will carry out my duty either way.”

“M-Midoriya, Todoroki--!” Iida’s voice shouts from behind them, but Izuku isn’t listening, and he knows Todoroki isn’t, either. Izuku shifts into a stance. Beside him, Todoroki does the same.

“You ready for this, Thermostat?”

Todoroki’s face does not change. “As ready as I’ll ever be, Spearmint. The two of us, working together…”

Stain narrows his eyes and tightens his grip on his sword.

“...We can protect them!”

“Fools!” Stain says, and sprints towards them, blades at the ready.

“Cover me for a sec!” Izuku hollers at Todoroki. “I’ll be with you in just a second, as soon as I--”

“Yeah, do whatever you need to do, I’ve got it!” Todoroki says, swinging his left arm and twisting his right foot into the ground simultaneously. Ice shoots fourth in harmony with the fire, forcing Stain back. “I’ll buy you whatever time I can!”

Izuku nods and turns away, standing behind Todoroki and shutting his eyes, willing all his thoughts on this moment.

“So, Dai,” Izuku says; behind him, he hears the swing of blades, the crack of ice, the roar of fire. “You ready?”

“Heck yeah, let’s do this.”

He focuses, concentrates; the name *Dai* flashes in his mind’s eye, and he feels a yank and tug at his chest.

He opens his eyes.

He sees a flash of something in the corner of his eye, and he whirls around to look; a blur slams into Stain's head, just as the villain runs at Todoroki once again.

"Hate to drop in here uninvited, Hero Killer," Dai says, grinning madly, "but I ain't letting you kill my buddy!"

Stain withdraws, leaping backwards and slamming his feet into the ground, the momentum carrying him backwards for a moment or two. Dai touches down in front of Todoroki, then looks over his shoulder and grins.

"What's up, Mr. Fahrenheit?" Dai asks.

Todoroki blinks at him. "Not...much."

Dai looks almost exactly how Izuku imagined him looking--young, maybe sixteen or seventeen, with short, shaggy hair and wild, mischievous eyes. The only thing Izuku hadn't imagined is Dai's electric blue outline; like Izuku is outlined with green when visible, Dai is outlined blue.

Nifty, Izuku thinks--and then he's brought back to the present by Stain's raging approach.

"Dai!" Izuku hollers, stepping up beside Todoroki. Dai shifts his gaze to him, a quizzical look replacing his grin. "Go get help! Find the heroes and bring them here!"

Dai nods. "Righto!" he says, saluting goofily; he gives a quick "See ya 'round!" to Todoroki, and then he spins on his heel and takes off, back out of the alley and disappearing around the corner.

"I'll get in close," Izuku says, crouching. "Support me from behind!"

"Alright!" Todoroki agrees, and they launch their next attack.

"Man, this blows!" Dai is saying to himself, sprinting down the street away from the action and, hopefully, to find some heroes who will help. The Hosu situation is horrible, he knows this for a fact; it's odd, he thinks, being brought back into the world to see the same chaos he'd seen when he left it.

This sucks, he thinks, running faster. He passes a crumbled building,

but quickly moves on past it, continuing on his way to fulfil his duty. *Come on, heroes, come on…*

He finds a group of them, led by--

Oh, seriously?

He doesn't care, right now. He's fairly certain he can pass off his odd appearance as some kind of a Quirk; after all, in this kind of world, it isn't unheard of for people to have glowing bodies (he thinks...hopefully he's right).

"Hey, heroes!" Dai shouts, sprinting towards the group--they're led by Endeavor, who Dai and the rest of the ex-holders universally *hate,* but he's the best bet right now--and, after all, as much as Dai hates to admit it, he *is* the number two hero. "Hey, you got a sec? I could use some help!"

Endeavor turns to him with a scowl. "Step out of the way, kid," he says; the rest of the heroes turn to look at Dai, more sympathetic as fires roar around them and screams fill their ears. "Follow the evacuation team, now. In this kind of situation...it isn't unlikely that the Hero Killer could show his face, and for that to happen on top of everything else…"

Dai grins. "Oh, haven't you heard?"

Tenya feels like the entire world is crashing down around him.

Midoriya and Todoroki are fighting the Hero Killer, flame after flame, blow after blow. Midoriya is still a ghost, currently; his body is slumped over on the other side of the alleyway, meaning the paralysis has worn off, but he doesn't re-enter it; he probably doesn't have an opening with which *to* re-enter it.

Midoriya...Todoroki...please…

This is his fault. As Tenya lies there on the ground, unmoving, *unable* to move, he feels this overwhelming sense of guilt and horror and fear. To think: if anything happens to Midoriya and Todoroki during this fight...the blood they're shedding, the injuries they're plowing through…

Midoriya is still a ghost, still using his Quirk, even though he knows the kind of backlash it has.

Todoroki is shooting flames and ice alike, coming mere breaths away from the Hero Killer's deadly swords--coming mere breaths away from *death itself.*

Midoriya is on the front lines, running at the Hero Killer again with a furious shout (and something about Stain looking "sharp" with those blades of his, though he could be wrong), and Todoroki is standing just in front of Tenya, left arm ablaze.

"M-Midoriya...T-Todoroki, please…" Tenya chokes, hardly able to *breathe,* let alone talk. "P-Please, s-stop this. I-I can't...I-I *can't…"*

Todoroki grits his teeth. "You want us to stop this!?" he demands, and Tenya's eyes go wide at the tone of Todoroki's voice. He doesn't sound thrilled nor furious, merely...commanding. Almost like a captain. "You want to stop this fight, Iida!? You want to make your brother proud!?"

Stain is closing in, closer than before; Todoroki's next round of flames forces him back.

"Then stand up!" Todoroki yells. *"Never forget...who you want to become!"*

Izuku lunges; the Hero Killer dodges easily, and Izuku finds himself wishing there's more he can do with One For All other than summoning ghosts right now. Keeping Dai summoned is already taking a lot out of him; he'll have to drop the hold, soon, if he wants to make it through the entire fight.

Todoroki sends a round of flames at the Hero Killer, forcing him back further, and Izuku spins around to regroup, teeth gritted. While he has this small moment to breathe, he notices his body on the other end of the alley, slumped in an unmoving heap.

Wait, Izuku thinks, eyes going wide. *Does that mean the paralysis wore off…?*

"Midoriya, dodge!"

Izuku leaps out of the way, closer to his body, and a round of ice springs forth. Stain leaps over it, swords slicing through spikes of ice, and Izuku grits his teeth tightly, glancing between Todoroki and to his body on the ground.

"I'm sorry, Dai," Izuku says, not sure whether or not the ex-holder can

still hear him. “I’m gonna have to drop it!”

He trusts Dai has found help by now, and he turns off One For All and re-enters his body.

The nausea hits him immediately, and he turns over on his hands and knees, his innards becoming his outers. Once he’s done puking, he rises to his feet, firing up One For All as soon as he’s up.

“Dai,” Izuku says, sprinting down the alley; Stain is running, too, coming closer and closer to Todoroki, “did you--?”

“Yeah, just in time!” Dai answers readily. *“Can’t say Mr. Dumpsterfire believed me, but the rest of the heroes definitely did! They should be on their way. I told them I was going with the evacuation team, but--oh crap, crap--”*

As he runs, One For All burning through him, he looks ahead, and while his Quirk is hot, his blood is cold.

There’s Stain, there’s Todoroki, and there’s--

--A swinging sword. One of Stain’s longswords, and he has it out to the side, swooping, coming in closer, towards Todoroki, and--

No!

--And then Iida is there. Somehow, Iida is there.

Iida’s armored shin knocks Stain’s blade right out of his hand in a swift, swinging motion. Without missing a beat, Iida drops one leg and kicks up the other, slamming his shin into Stain’s arms, which he put up to shield himself. Stain flees, leaping backwards with his swords, and Todoroki and Iida stand there, gasping heavily.

Izuku is so relieved he could cry, but he doesn’t, rather racing towards the two of them to regroup.

There’s a beat, in which the three of them do nothing more than stare the Hero Killer down across the alley from them.

“Todoroki...Midoriya, both of you...I’m...I’m sorry,” Iida says. “You shouldn’t have had to get involved with this, clean up the mess I made…”

“We’ll talk later,” Izuku cuts in. “I promise, we’ll talk later, alright? For now...let’s focus on beating this guy for good.”

Help is coming, but we have no idea when it'll get here. Until then…

…Until then, we have to…

"Todoroki," Iida says, "can you freeze my legs without plugging up the exhaust?"

Todoroki looks at him oddly, but nods. "Yeah," he says. "I just need an opening."

"I'm on it!" Izuku says immediately, already firing up One For All again and racing forward. "Cover me!"

And he knows they will. As he runs towards Stain for this final attack, he knows they'll be able to do it.

Iida, Todoroki--

The three of them, working together--

They can do this.

It ends...quickly.

Very quickly, actually.

It passes in a blur, a flash; they easily overwhelm the Hero Killer once Iida is in the fray, and throwing Dai in as a wrench served as just another reason for the Hero Killer to be constantly looking over his shoulder.

Izuku went in for a punch, and Iida fired up the special move he used at the Sports Festival and went in for a kick.

The Hero Killer goes down incredibly quickly, after that. Izuku and Iida regroup with Todoroki, whose left arm is still ablaze, and they're all ready to fight back, ready for their next attack--

But the Hero Killer isn't moving. He's still, motionless, lying on a heap of ice on the other side of the alley.

Izuku's chest is heaving. His stomach churns with fresh and leftover nausea, and his hands are shaking.

"Is…" Izuku's breath is stuck in his throat. "Is he…did...d-did we...?"

“No,” Todoroki cuts in immediately, “he’s alive. We didn’t.”

Izuku releases a huge breath, and beside him, he hears Iida do the same. He’s about to say something else--a few choice words for Iida--but nearby shouts draw his attention to the end of the alley.

“Hey! Here they are!”

“You, kids! Are you alright!?”

“They’re injured, call an ambulance--!”

Izuku feels like laughing, almost--the fact that he and Iida and Todoroki are still *alive* after...after all of *that* is just...it’s beyond him, really. He has no idea how they managed to make it out of that alive.

Within his head, the ex-holders are whooping and cheering, Dai and Nana being specifically loud, although that might just be because Izuku is more familiar with them and can pick out their voices easier amongst the rest of the din. They’re all whooping and cackling and shouting their own encouragements and a couple final jibes at the Hero Killer, and Izuku smiles, the urge to laugh becoming stronger and stronger under the influence of their enthusiasm.

“W-Wait!” One of the heroes--Izuku has seen her before, she was on the scene in the heat of the Nomus’ attacks--says, raising a shaking finger to point. “Is that the *Hero Killer!?”*

“So that kid wasn’t lying!” another hero agrees, moving forward with wide eyes. “H-How did--? A couple of *kids…”*

Again; it’s beyond Izuku, how they survived that fight. In the end, it was really just because Stain was desperate and made a lot of mistakes, left himself open; Izuku’s surprise attacks threw a wrench in the fight more than once, as did Dai’s appearance and disappearance, but honestly...if the fight had gone on for any longer, at the rate it was going…

No, Izuku thinks, shaking his head feverishly. *Don’t think about the what-ifs. Everything’s alright now. There’s nothing to worry about. There’s nothing--*

He catches movement out of the corner of his eye.

Stain.

A gleam.

A beat.

“False heroes will only continue to serve as a menace to society if they are allowed to live.”

He moves without thinking, One For All burning through his veins. Stain moves again; there’s a gleam of metal, the gleam of a *knife,* and all Izuku can think is *no, not today, Stain. Not* ever.

“Iida--!”

He feels something--a stab, sharp, but also not there. The pain blurs his vision but it...doesn’t last very long at all. The world stills; his vision tilts; he’s falling, and out of the corner of his sight he sees Iida’s eyes, blown wide with horror.

Then there’s nothing.

“So, tell me…”

Tenya can’t breathe. His world slows until it’s barely moving, and all he can see is Midoriya, positioned in front of him, in between Tenya and the Hero Killer.

There’s a knife in his chest.

“...What is he like, this 'Midoriya'?”

A shout grates on Tenya’s throat but he can’t hear himself say anything. Midoriya hits the ground in front of him but Tenya doesn’t hear that, either. He sees a blinking red light on the bracelet strapped around Midoriya’s wrist, blinking slowly at first then faster, panicking.

“Well, Midoriya, he’s...he’s a lot of things, Nii-san. He’s brave, and smart, and--honestly, he’s what I aspire to be, as a hero. Someone who can smile in the face of opposition...someone who can think his way out of things...someone who isn’t afraid to put his own life on the line…”

Tensei smiles at him. “He sounds like a great friend, Tenya.”

“He is. He’s easily the best friend I’ve ever made.”

Todoroki yells something, and then he’s kneeling on the ground by Midoriya. The pros are here now, too; someone’s on the phone, several others are are securing Stain. There’s blood on the ground, pooling beneath Midoriya; there’s a splatter of blood on his bell and another on his limp hand.

No. Please. No. Don’t--don’t, no--what is--no, this can’t--how--no, please don’t--

Tensei smiles softly, sadly almost, looking down at his hands. “Even though I’ve only known him for such a short amount of time, he’s become something of a brother to me. I don’t know what I’d do without him.”

“MIDORIYA!!”

…

…

...

...Why hasn’t my boy come back yet?

Chapter 20: Stay Alive

Chapter End Notes

"Stay Alive Reprise" from Hamilton

“I held my head up high...
I was aiming for the sky…”

Words Fail

Chapter Summary

"Words Fail" from Dear Evan Hansen

“I never meant to make it such a mess.
I never thought that it would go this far.
So I just stand here, sorry,
Searching for something to say.
Something to say.
There’s nothing I can say.”

Chapter Notes

Aaaaaand--ART!! :D

WARNING FOR BLOOD IN BOTH ARTWORKS

FloatingOnAFeeling

solarflare-vulpix

thanks you two i'm suffering

Enjoy the chapter!! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Keep breathing, Izuku!”

“Hang in there, you’re gonna be okay, just hang in there—!”

“Holy crap, holy crap—”

“Hold on, please, hold on, sweetheart, please—!”

“DAGNABBIT KID IF YOU FREAKING DIE I’M DRAGGING YOU BACK DOWN TO THE LAND OF THE LIVING WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT!!”

“Kiddo—kiddo, you have to hang in there, please, hang in there, don’t let go. Don’t let go—!”

“Izuku!”

[Izuku]

[maps.location_pin]

Toshinori stares down at his phone for a good long while, confused. He's on his way home from a board meeting at U.A. discussing the final exams, which are coming up reasonably soon; the sun is setting, and overall, it's a nice, peaceful night.

It isn't unusual for Izuku to text him, so seeing Izuku's name attached to the message is something completely normal, but…

A location? And in Hosu City, no less, far beyond Gran's place (to Toshinori's memory, of course).

After a moment, he sends his response.

[Toshinori]
You're in Hosu? Taking down villains with Gran?

There is no answer. More confused than before—and becoming a bit concerned—he sends another text, roughly a minute later.

[Toshinori]
Izuku? Are you there?

It's weird, to not get a reply from him. Izuku is usually right on the ball when it comes to Toshinori's messages. So why isn't he now?

[Toshinori]
Kid? What's up?
If something's the matter, feel free to tell me, alright?
Izuku?
Hey, kiddo? What's wrong?

Izuku isn't answering him. Toshinori wants to pass it off as him being busy, him and Gran being in the middle of taking down a villain or the likes, but that doesn't seem right. There's something deeper within him that tells him that something is horribly, horribly wrong here.

He closes out of his messenger, deciding to wait a few minutes before texting Izuku again—after all, it's probably nothing. There's no reason for him to be overly concerned—although, Izuku sending him a location pin out of nowhere is awfully strange—but it's fine. It has to be fine, Toshinori thinks, absentmindedly opening his news app—

He stops walking.

“HOSU IN FLAMES: VILLAIN ATTACK IN THE HEART OF HOSU CITY!!”

Hosu City.

Izuku’s location pin is for Hosu City.

Toshinori zooms back over to his messages so quickly that his thumb actually hurts. His fingers swipe across the screen, and a second later, he sends his message.

[Toshinori]
I just saw the news.
Izuku, are you okay?
Kid, please, say something.
Anything.
Please.

There’s nothing, no response, no “HA, NOT DEAD!”, no typical Izuku flare. There isn’t even a single word, just—nothing. Nothing at all. The messages aren’t even coming up as “read,” just—there’s nothing. Absolutely *nothing*.

And Toshinori is beginning to panic. The article was brand new, and there were a couple pictures, but even from the minimal information he received, Toshinori knows that it’s bad. Whatever’s going on in Hosu right now is *bad*.

And Izuku sent Toshinori his exact location, for some reason—an alleyway near the outskirts of Hosu City, by the looks of it. Toshinori doesn’t know what this means and he doesn’t want to think about it at all—after all, the more he *does* think about it...the more the pinned location sounds like a *distress signal*—

His phone dings with a new notification, and Toshinori almost pulls one out of Izuku’s book and leaps out of his skin, but he’s able to catch himself and stay composed long enough to read the words on-screen.

[Unknown]
Is this Yagi Toshinori?

...Not Izuku. Toshinori’s heart sinks, and he responds before even considering the fact that whoever is on the other end of the messages somehow knows his civilian name.

[Toshinori]
Yes, this is he.
Who is this?

[Unknown]
This is Hosu General Hospital. We are messaging you on the account that you have been listed as one of Midoriya Izuku's emergency contacts.

Toshinori doesn't even *think* about when or how he became one of Izuku's emergency contacts; no, his head is spinning, because he's actually *being used* as Izuku's emergency contact right now.

Which can only mean—

[Toshinori]
What happened
Tell me what happened

He almost doesn't want to know, but he must. He must know.

[Unknown]
Midoriya Izuku was involved in a villain attack and took a knife to the chest. At the time, we are unsure of whether or not he will survive.

Toshinori's world *spins.*

[Unknown]
If you are in the area, please come to Hosu General Hospital as quickly as you can.

He's running even before he finishes reading the message.

Where is my boy?

He said he will be back. He promised he will be back. I am here and I am waiting, and the two not-friends that my boy saved are waiting, too. They are not afraid anymore, and I am glad they are not afraid, but now, I *am the one who is afraid.*

Where is my boy?

He said he'd be back.

He promised he'd be back soon and he doesn't like to break his promises.

Where is he?

Where is he?

Where is he?

People come. A big, scary thing moves past us, with bright flashing lights. I watch. The kids watch, too. What is that? I want to follow it, for some reason—I feel like there's something I need to do.

I do not follow it. My boy told me to stay here until he gets back, and that is what I will do.

I will wait.

Other people come down the road. I know some of them—one of them is a friend of my boy. I know him. He was sad during the festival. He's been hurt many times, but he cares about my boy, and I know my boy cares about him very much.

Many of them come to help the not-friends I am protecting, and the strangers are safe and they want to help so I let them near. The not-friends my boy saved are happy to see these strangers.

But my boy is not with them.

Why is he not with them?

Why hasn't he come back yet?

My boy's friend, the one who hurts a lot but is trying his best—much like my boy, actually—comes toward me. I feel a deep hurt in him, but it's a new hurt that wasn't there before. I feel fear and sadness and guilt and regret and it hurts me, too.

My boy cares about this boy very much. He can't hurt like this; my boy hurts when his friends hurt, and this means that my boy will hurt even more. You can't hurt like this, you can't. If you hurt like this then my boy will hurt even more—

Where is my boy?

The friend of my boy kneels on the ground, watching me. "Howler," *he says—that's my name, so I listen,* "...can you...I...just, come with me, okay?"

What?

No, I can't. My boy told me to stay here and here I will stay until he gets back. I told him I would. The not-friends are being taken care of by the other strangers, but my boy told me to stay here. I will stay here. I will wait for him.

"We're going to go see Midoriya," *my boy's friend promises, and—Midoriya? My boy is called that a lot. It must be him.* "You want to see him, don't you?"

Yes, yes I do, and I will. He will be back. He's somewhere, and he's going to come back soon. I know he will come back soon.

"Howler, Midoriya isn't coming back."

What?

That doesn't make any sense. My boy said he was coming back. He has to come back.

But my boy's friend is not lying. He is scared and he is sad and he is hurt and something is very wrong if my boy broke his promise. Something is wrong.

My boy is somewhere I can't reach him. He's somewhere I can't protect him. I don't know where he is, only that he isn't here and that I don't know where to find him.

But, my boy's friend is here, and my boy loves his friends very much. So I will go with my boy's friend and I will protect him until my boy gets back.

My boy will *come back.*

He will.

Shouto is alone.

Midoriya was taken in an ambulance shorty after... *it.* And then Iida was pulled aside by remaining paramedics to be checked over while they waited for a second ambulance to arrive. When the second ambulance *did* arrive, Iida was taken away.

And Shouto was left alone, unscathed from the fight; the most he got was a nasty cut on the face when Stain threw a knife he barely managed to dodge.

He hadn't tried talking to Iida. Iida hadn't tried talking to him.

Midoriya's medical bracelet had beeped and blinked until the paramedics loaded him in an ambulance and whisked him away, and Shouto hadn't been able to say a single thing. To anyone.

And now Iida is gone, too, and Shouto is with the group of pros. He's going to the hospital later, anyway, to get looked at, but it won't be much more than an overnight visit for him, at the very *most;* chances are, the only thing they'll have to do is give him a quick look over, maybe bandage the cut on his cheek.

But, he wonders how long Iida will be in the hospital. He wonders how long *Midoriya* will be in the hospital.

If he even—

No. He'll live. Stop it.

Shouto finds Howler on the street with two kids—Howler, Midoriya's service dog, waiting there patiently. Waiting for *Midoriya.* Shouto talks to the animal, and he doesn't know how much Howler understands, but it seems to be more than Shouto expected him to. Shouto is able to coax him into coming along with him and the pros, and Howler stays glued to Shouto's side.

Hosu City is a *mess,* but it's just the aftermath of the attack, now. The Nomus have been beaten off, and the fires are being put out; police and paramedics swarm the area, and a group of pro heroes is still leading an evacuation.

The only thing keeping Shouto grounded in reality is his grip on Howler's collar. Without it, he has no doubt he'd float right away.

Paramedics check him over. He sits on a stretcher, straining to maintain his hold on Howler, and Howler stands closer, letting him. The medics tape a patch of gauze over his cheek after cleaning it, and then they check his breathing, ask a couple of routine questions, flash a penlight in his eyes—and then they say he's okay, and they're off to help other victims in more dire need.

And Shouto watches this, all of this.

He wants to drift away.

He wants to *scream.*

Shouto doesn't remember arriving at the hospital, alone aside from Midoriya's service dog (Midoriya—the name stabs Shouto in the gut). He doesn't remember taking a seat in the near-empty waiting room. He doesn't remember Howler jumping into the seat beside him and promptly laying his head in Shouto's lap.

When he thinks about it—and it takes a long time before he's able to actually *think*— he pulls his phone out of his back pocket. The first thing he sees is Midoriya's text, and the first thing that comes to mind from that is an image of Midoriya, unconscious in a pool of his own blood, but Shouto pushes that thought away as quickly as possible.

He finds the group chat in his messenger.

[Chatroom: "INSERT CLEVER TITLE HERE"]

[THERMOSTAT is ONLINE]

[Thermostat]
Kirishima. Uraraka. Where are you two?

[Gravity Falls]
I'm at Gunhead's agency, just finished training for the day! :D
Whatcha up to?

[The Rock]
Closing up shop now over here, too. Today's been a pretty productive day, if i do say so myself. [emoji.thumbs_up]
Why do you ask? What's up?

[Thermostat]
There was a villain attack in Hosu City.
Midoriya...he's hurt.

[The Rock]
Holy crap seriously?

[Gravity Falls]
Is he okay??
What happened?

[Thermostat]
I can't...I can't go into the details, but it's bad.
It's, it's really bad.

[Gravity Falls]

Oh my gosh
Wait
That text. I got a text from Deku before. His location.

[The Rock]
Holy crap, was that…
Holy crap. Holy *crap*.
He was asking for help. It was a distress signal.

[Thermostat]
…Yeah.

[Gravity Falls]
Todoroki, where are you right now?

[Thermostat]
Hosu General Hospital.
They…they took Midoriya here a while ago.
I'm waiting.

[Gravity Falls]
Let me talk to Gunhead. I'm on my way.
Hang in there, okay?

[The Rock]
I'm at the train station. On my way. We're coming.

[Thermostat]
Thank you.

[Gravity Falls]
Don't thank us. We'll be there soon. Hang in there. <3 Keep us updated, okay?

[The Rock]
^^^^

[Thermostat]
Okay

[GRAVITY FALLS is OFFLINE]

[THE ROCK is OFFLINE]

Shouto lowers his phone again and stares down at it for a long moment. Then, he darkens the screen, sets it off to the side, and buries

his shaking fingers into Howler's thick fur, just to have something to hold onto.

He sees white, finds himself in the white although he doesn't know where he is or what it means. He looks around, once, twice, then again; one way, he sees seven figures of varrying heights. They're too far away for him to make out any distinguishable features. He turns the other way; there stands a single figure, a man, closer than the others. He recognizes him. He reaches out.

I don't want to die.

The white fades into black.

It doesn't take long for Toshinori to make it to the hospital, but at the same time, he can't get there fast enough. Once he's through the double doors, back in his "Yagi Toshinori" form, he looks around. He doesn't know what he's looking for, really; after all, there's no way Izuku is *here,* not after getting a literal *knife to the chest—*

Todoroki is here, though, sitting on one of the chairs in the waiting room. His head is down, Toshinori can't see his face, and he has his hands buried in Howler's fur. The dog is laying in Todoroki's lap, occasionally glancing up at the boy's face.

The sight immediately tells Toshinori two things: One, Todoroki was involved in whatever happened, and two, there hasn't yet been any news regarding Izuku's condition.

Toshinori considers pestering the front desk about it, but ultimately doesn't; he's still just as frantic and panicked as before, but seeing Todoroki in such a still, heartbroken state makes something within him snap to attention.

Izuku is in the hands of the doctors. There's nothing Toshinori or anyone else can do for him.

But Todoroki is sitting there, alone, and there *is* something Toshinori can do about that. Cautiously, he makes his way over to where Todoroki is sitting; Howler raises his head to look at him, but Todoroki does not.

"Todoroki-kun?"

Now Todoroki looks, head snapping up so quickly it looks like it hurts. Todoroki's eyes are full of distress, which is odd; Toshinori doesn't think he's ever seen the boy like this before.

"I'm sorry," Toshinori apologizes immediately, "I didn't mean to startle you. It's…it's been a rough night for you, hasn't it?"

Todoroki blinks at him. "…Who are you, again?"

"Ahh, I'm sorry, I should have started with that," Toshinori says, shaking his head. "My name is Yagi Toshinori. I'm…a friend of the Midoriyas. I came as soon as I heard."

Todoroki ducks his head again and says nothing. Toshinori bites his lip, feeling completely out of his element—while "All Might" is good at dealing with the public, Yagi Toshinori is rather inept.

"…Mind if I sit with you, my boy?"

There's a long moment. "…I don't mind," Todoroki says, and Toshinori takes a seat on the chair next to the boy. Howler bumps his forearm with his nose, and Toshinori scratches the dog behind the ears for just a moment.

"Are you alright?" Toshinori asks gently, and it feels like such a dumb question because obviously no one is alright right now.

Todoroki doesn't answer. "He's…he's been back there for a long time," he says stiffly, though his voice is small. "Midoriya, I mean. Ever since the ambulance brought him here, I…I haven't heard anything…"

Toshinori's heart clenches, but he does his best not to let it show. "It's alright," he says, and he says it for both Todoroki and himself. "Believe me, Izuku is tough. He'll pull through this."

He has to.

Please let him pull through this.

Todoroki swallows thickly. His fingers are curled around handfuls of Howler's thick fur, so tightly that his knuckles are white.

"I was right there."

Toshinori says nothing.

"…I was *right there,"* Todoroki says again, voice flat right up until the

end. “I was right there when it happened, I could’ve—I could have done something, but I—I didn’t. I wasn’t fast enough. All I did…”

His hands are shaking.

“…All I did was *watch.”*

Toshinori’s heart clenches again, tighter this time, but he shakes his head. “You mustn’t tell yourself that, my boy,” he says. “What happened tonight…should not have happened at all, to anyone, but you can’t blame yourself for it.”

Todoroki says nothing.

“…You’re a friend of Izuku’s, are you not?” Toshinori asks, even though he already knows the answer. Todoroki stiffens for a moment, but ultimately, he nods. “Then you know the kind of person Izuku is, don’t you?”

Todoroki holds his silence.

“…If he knew you were sitting out here right now,” Toshinori goes on quietly, “blaming yourself for what happened…beating yourself up over it…it would devastate him. I understand where you’re coming from, believe me, I do, but…there are things that happen that are beyond our control. I know that it hurts, but…the most you can do now is be there for Izuku through all of this.”

The silence stretches for another long, long moment, but just when Toshinori doesn’t think Todoroki will answer him at all, the boy nods, although the movement is sharp and small.

They sit there together for a long time. Todoroki says nothing more, and Toshinori doesn’t push him. A while passes, then another while. Then another. And another. Until Toshinori has no idea how long they’ve been here, how long they haven’t gotten any news. The hospital’s text flashes through his mind’s eye; *he took a knife to the chest, we don’t know if he’ll survive.*

“…How long were you here before me?” Toshinori asks, if just to have something else to think about. Todoroki swallows thickly and says nothing for a long moment.

“…Honestly, I…I have no idea.” It’s always been hard to read Todoroki, but now it’s painfully easy, and Toshinori almost wishes it isn’t. “I don’t know how long it’s been. I wasn’t keeping track.”

“Understandable,” Toshinori says, nodding stiffly. Now that he’s spoken with Todoroki for a bit, his mind is drifting back towards Izuku, and the words *he took a knife to the chest* play in his mind’s eye, accompanied by a mental image he knows he’ll be seeing in his nightmares.

There has been no news. It’s been hours by now and there’s no news. Toshinori thinks about Inko for a moment, wonders if she’s been contacted (then decides that she must’ve, if Toshinori was contacted as well), wonders if she’s on her way, when she’ll get here.

He thinks about Izuku’s friends, about Todoroki, but then about Kirishima and Iida and Uraraka, too. Iida is interning in Hosu City, if Toshinori remembers correctly. He should be here, waiting with Todoroki in that case.

Unless—

“For Midoriya Izuku?”

Howler’s head snaps up along with Todoroki’s and Toshinori’s, and the three of them are on their feet and charging over immediately. The doctor seems startled and confused, and his eyes fall on Toshinori first.

“Are you Yagi Toshinori?”

Toshinori nods immediately, holding his breath, hardly able to breathe. He notices Howler nuzzling Todoroki’s leg, and Todoroki grabbing another fistful of the dog’s fur. The doctor glances at Todoroki for a brief moment, then raises his head back to Toshinori.

“Midoriya is in the ICU,” the doctor explains thickly, but not without hope, “but he *is* alive. The knife missed his heart and most of his major arteries. I won’t go into details right now, but know that he is alive and that, with time, he’ll be able to make a full recovery.”

Toshinori’s world spins again, but for another reason this time. Izuku is alive. He’s hurt and he’s in intensive care but he’s alive. It’s not much but it’s enough, it’s more than enough.

“…If you’d like,” the doctor says, “considering your position, you can visit him for a short bit. However…” His gaze shifts to Todoroki, and his eyes turn sad.

Toshinori and Todoroki know what this means without being told, and

Todoroki is nodding just as Toshinori opens his mouth to ask the doctor if there're any strings they could pull edgewise.

"It's alright," Todoroki says, still nodding, though the movement is shaky and Toshinori can't tell if he's doing it as an answer, or as a reassurement for himself. "It's—it's alright, go. I'll be fine."

Toshinori wants to go, *so very badly,* but at the same time—

"Go," Todoroki says again. "I'll—-I'll see him some other time. He's...he's going to pull through now, right? You know he is?"

The doctor smiles sadly, but nods. "That's true," he says. "Your friend, Midoriya...he's definitely a tough one. Once he's moved into a room, I don't see why you can't visit."

"Thank you," Todoroki says, and Toshinori, for once since arriving at the hospital, cannot tell what he's feeling by his voice.

The doctor gestures and turns, and Toshinori makes to follow him, feeling less like driver and more like passenger.

He takes roughly ten steps down the hall before he pauses and looks over his shoulder.

Todoroki is standing where Toshinori left him, gaze cast downward, knuckles white, fingers curled around a handful of Howler's fur. He hasn't moved, and Toshinori can't see his eyes, and Toshinori knows that Todoroki is strong, very strong, but perhaps this is too much. Perhaps he shouldn't leave Todoroki alone. Perhaps—

He hears the automatic doors of the hospital slide open, and Todoroki raises his head to look; Uraraka and Kirishima sprint up to him, eyes wide, speaking words that Toshinori is too far away to hear.

They talk; Uraraka's eyes are full of urgency and panic, and Todoroki says something back to her, a look of deep hurt burned into his eyes. She surges forward unexpectedly, snaking her arms around him tightly, and although he jumps and stiffens at first, he quickly accepts and returns the embrace, finally relinquishing his death grip on Howler's fur. A second later, Kirishima reaches out and squeezes Todoroki's shoulder.

Some of the tension in Toshinori's shoulders eases, and he lets out a small sigh of relief. Todoroki isn't alone, then; he has friends with him now, and honestly, he'd probably appreciate their company more than

Toshinori's, who is really nothing more than a stranger.

Trusting Uraraka and Kirishima to look after him, Toshinori turns and follows the doctor (who'd been considerate enough to wait for him) once again, and they head down winding halls all the way to Izuku's room.

"I won't lie, we didn't think he'd make it."

Toshinori swears his heart stops. "What?"

"When he arrived here," the doctor goes on, quieter, more reserved, "he was...he was in bad shape. He'd lost a lot of blood already, and his vital signs were all over the place. He flatlined twice while we were operating on him."

There's a mixture of blood and bile in Toshinori's throat.

"But, you know," the doctor says, looking up for a moment, "he's stronger than any of us gave him credit for, that kid. I've seen people go down with lesser wounds than that, but somehow...he held on. None of us really know how he did it, but, he did."

"Thank you," Toshinori manages, because it's the first thing he thinks to say. His voice trembles, but doesn't break. "For...for saving him."

"I'm glad we were able to," the doctor says, shaking his head. "It was a fight, a damn close fight, but he pulled through it. It's just a matter of time, now. He'll be alright."

Toshinori nods, looking downward.

"Here, this is it." The doctor turns towards a closed door, feet going still, and Toshinori stops beside him. Numbers on the door read *36* in black, bold print.

"He's on heavy painkillers," the doctor says, "and I don't expect him to be waking up any time soon, but on the off-chance that he does, call for a nurse, alright? The painkillers should keep him knocked out, but you never know."

Toshinori nods. "I understand," he says for the second time in the past five minutes. "Thank you."

The doctor nods. "I can only give you a few minutes," he says, stepping away from the door and turning back towards the hall. "I'll

be back then."

Toshinori nods his acknowledgement, and the doctor starts down the hall once more, leaving him behind. Toshinori stares at the black numbers on the door, the image leaving an imprint on his eyelids when he blinks and a deeper, more permanent picture in his memories.

And then, he reaches out and opens the door.

It's dark. He hears familiar sounds, like the steady beat of a heart monitor and the hum of an oxygen tank. He's heard them all too many times—actually, this entire scene is painstakingly familiar. The oxygen tank, the heart monitor, the drawn curtains, barely letting moonlight in, the darkness, the antiseptic smell, the atmosphere, the pain. He'd been in a situation like this before, following the fight in which he sustained permanent damage to his innards.

But it hurts more now than it did before, when it was him lying on the hospital bed, hooked up with wires and tubes and God only knew what else.

It hurts more because this is Toshinori's successor. This is Midoriya Izuku, some...some...honestly? Toshinori never knew how to properly describe the kid. He's some kind of insane force of nature, a dangerous, terrifying thing to be reckoned with, but at the same time, he tells dumb jokes to make his friends laugh, wants nothing more than to save people.

He's...a lot of things, this boy. He's full of light and life and energy, and Toshinori didn't realize how big of an influence the kid had had on his life.

Until now.

Because it's the same kid that dropped dead on him as a first impression—the kid who loved puns—the kid who stood his ground and stalled for time at the USJ and saved so many lives—the kid who brought back Toshinori's will to live—the kid who gave Toshinori a reason to keep fighting—the kid who taught him what it meant to actually smile again, the kid who admired him first as All Might but now as simply Yagi Toshinori—

—That is now still, skin ashen, eyes closed, hooked up with tubes and wires and a steadily beeping heart monitor.

He can't breathe. He ends up on the other side of the room though he doesn't remember moving, and he sinks onto a stool by the bedside, his chest full of knots. Izuku is unconscious, an oxygen mask over his mouth and nose, bandages disappearing beneath his hospital gown. His skin is *ashen,* dark, bruise-like circles around his closed eyes, and —

It hurts. Toshinori feels like he's been stabbed in the gut, the breath yanked from his lungs, and when he thinks about it, he reaches out and settles his hand on Izuku's forehead. He hisses through his teeth; he'd been expecting deathly cold, but the kid feels almost like he's burning.

Overuse of his Quirk, something in the back of his mind informs. *He always gets fevers like this. This is normal. He's okay.*

There's a lot that isn't okay about this situation. More about this situation is *twisted* and *wrong* than it is okay and right. There is some truth to be had here, though, a few *good* truths along with the bad ones, such as the fact that there *is* warmth in Izuku's skin, even though it's feverish, that he *is* still breathing, even though he needs an oxygen tank to be able to do so, that he's *here,* even though he's in a hospital.

He's here. He pulled through and he's going to keep pulling through— at least, that's what Toshinori tells himself. It's the truth he has to believe to keep his own sanity intact.

True to the doctor's word, Izuku does not wake up, not that Toshinori was expecting him to; when the doctor returns and informs Toshinori that it's time for him to leave, Toshinori smoothes Izuku's hair back off his face, then lets go.

He doesn't want to.

Uraraka's hand is on his forearm. Kirishima's is on his shoulder. Howler is a real, comforting weight against his leg, grounding Shouto in this reality he doesn't want but does indeed belong in.

"...Todoroki," Uraraka says, voice small; she'd been crying when she hugged him, and it shows in the tremble in her voice. "...D-Deku, do...have…"

"He's alive," Shouto blurts, and he does it not just for Uraraka and Kirishima, but as confirmation to himself, too. "He's hurt but he's alive. When he gets moved into a room, the...the doctor said we can

visit."

He hears their sighs of relief; Kirishima gives his shoulder a squeeze. They're sitting down again, the three of them, Shouto in the middle. Shouto still feels like a physical part of him has been ripped right out of his chest, but the weight on his shoulders is lesser than before, now that he knows Midoriya will pull through.

He sees blood when he blinks. Sees Midoriya's body. Sees a knife through his chest. He swallows reflexively; Uraraka squeezes his forearm, as does Kirishima to his shoulder, and Shouto is so, so happy they're here. Even though they're just as scared and shaken as he is, it's not as bad now as it'd been when he was alone.

"Gunhead is waiting for me at the train station," Uraraka says quietly, her hand a grounding, comforting weight on Shouto's arm. "I-I told him what was going on. He's booking a hotel for the night."

"Oh," Kirishima says, blinking, "I probably should've thought about that, now that you mention it...my internship isn't that far from here, though, so I could probably take a train back tonight and come again tomorrow, once they've moved Midoriya into a room."

Shouto nods. "I'm interning with my father," he says, "so I'll be right around the corner."

Uraraka nods, the movement small. A second later, her eyes fill with something. "W-Wait, wasn't...wasn't Iida interning in Hosu? I feel like he mentioned something along those lines…"

Iida.

Shouto's eyes widen a bit at the thought. He hadn't even so much as *thought* of Iida since arriving at the hospital; Iida was injured in the fight, sure, but not nearly as injured as Midoriya. He should be fine, physically.

But, emotionally...mentally...he's probably just as wrecked as Shouto. If not *more,* considering Midoriya was the one who took a *knife* for him.

"...He was," Shouto says, throat constricted. "He was interning in Hosu."

"He already knows about Midoriya, then, right?" Kirishima asked, blinking. "Then...where...?"

“He was there,” Shouto says thickly. “When it happened.”

The silence stretches, tension growing the longer it does. Uraraka whispers a quiet, almost indistinguishable, *“Oh, Iida,”* but that’s it.

A loud *ding* splits the quiet, making everyone give a collective jump, including Howler. Kirishima is already apologizing, reaching into his back pocket and yanking out his phone.

“Oh, crap,” Kirishima says, hopping to his feet, “there’s only one train left tonight, I have to go. But.” He grasps Shouto’s forearm and looks him dead in the eyes. “I’ll be back tomorrow, alright? If you hear anything, *anything,* let me know, okay?”

“I will,” Shouto agrees immediately, nodding. “I’ll...see you then.”

Kirishima nods, but he looks torn. “I’m—I’m sorry,” he says, “for running out—”

“Just go,” Uraraka says, “it’s okay. We’ll see you tomorrow.”

Kirishima nods again, then pivots on his heel and makes a break for the door.

“Todoroki,” Uraraka says, voice quiet, as the sliding doors shut behind Kirishima, “what...what happened?”

Shouto swallows thickly. “Villains attacked the city,” he says. “Iida wound up facing off against the Hero Killer.”

Uraraka makes a strangled, choked sound, bringing a hand up toward her mouth. “The Hero Killer?”

Shouto nods, trying not to relive the memories as he speaks them. “I wasn’t there for all of it, but Midoriya was there with him. The Hero Killer, he…” He can’t do it, he can’t. “...He had a knife. He was aiming for Iida, but...well...you know Midoriya. He couldn’t let that happen.”

Uraraka’s hand disappears from his forearm, and she brings her hands to her lap, linking her fingers together and squeezing. “...It happened again,” she whispers, voice suddenly strained. “D-Deku, r-risking his life for us... *a-again…”*

She’s been strong so far, this entire time, trying to put on a brave face for Shouto’s sake. It’s a bit odd, he thinks, how far she’s going for him here, considering they barely even know each other, but either way,

she's crumbling now, and he has no idea what to do about it.

Howler turns out to be more competent in this situation than Shouto, when the dog leans over and presses the side of his head against Uraraka's leg. Uraraka jumps, then lets out a shaky breath, threading her fingers through the dog's fur.

Shouto wants to say something, be there for her like she was for him when she first arrived, but honestly, he's just as broken as she is, here. Anything he says at this point would come across as flat or insincere, he knows it will.

So he doesn't say anything.

Uraraka's phone dings a little bit later, and she sniffs, wipes her eyes, then checks the screen. It's a text from Gunhead, she says, getting to her feet. She has to go; he's waiting for her. She apologizes to Shouto with a promise to be back, to which Shouto nods and thanks her, for everything.

She leaves shortly thereafter, leaving Howler and Shouto behind. Shouto sits there in the silence of the waiting room; Howler has moved back to leaning his chin against Shouto's thigh, and Shouto absentmindedly strokes the dog's fur.

Then he gets to his feet. Howler stands beside him, flanking him when he crosses the room to the receptionist's desk. The receptionist smiles at him softly, asks what she can do to help.

"I-I'm wondering about Iida Tenya," Shouto says, trying to keep his voice steady. "He's...he's a close friend of mine. Is there any possibility I can see him?"

"Hold that thought," the receptionist says, tapping away at her computer for a moment or two, then scrolling through whatever results pop up onscreen. After a moment or so, she nods, passing a visitor badge over the countertop. "That hallway? Follow it until you reach room twenty-seven."

So Iida's already been taken care of.

That's a relief.

"Thank you," Shouto says, pinning the badge to the front of his hero costume (it's an odd thought; realizing that, a few hours ago, he'd been patrolling the streets with his father. Things went downhill so

quickly…)

“Can...can I bring him with me?” Shouto asks, gesturing at Howler, sitting at his side.

The receptionist takes one look at Howler, still wearing his certified vest, then nods. Shouto thanks her, bows, then turns and starts down the hall, following her instructions.

Physically, it seems Iida is alright. Already okay to accept visitors and everything.

But Shouto won’t *really* know how “alright” Iida is until he sees him.

Midoriya will be alright.

That’s what the doctor told Tenya, on account that he was there when *it* happened. Midoriya is undergoing intense treatment and he won’t be back on his feet for another long while, but he’ll be alright. With time and rest, he’ll be okay.

Which is a huge relief. *Ginormous.* While doctors fussed over him and bandaged his arms, ran a few x-rays, all Tenya could think about was *no, don’t worry about me, worry about Midoriya,* because after all, a knife to the shoulder was *nothing* compared to a knife to the chest.

Midoriya is fine, Tenya knows this now. No, perhaps “fine” is the wrong word, but even so; he’s recovering, and it’ll take time but he’ll be okay.

It’s huge, really, that relief.

Except, once Tenya’s panic is gone and that relief replaces it, the *relief* is replaced by an intense, crushing feeling of...of…

His phone dings on the side table. He hasn’t touched it since arriving here. He reaches for it with his good arm, wincing as the bandages shift against his shoulder. The very, *very* first thing he sees when he looks at the screen is Midoriya’s message; his location, mass-sent to all his contacts.

He feels like he’s being suffocated, but his eyes flittle downwards, to his new message.

Kirishima. Not through the group chat, just to him.

[Kirishima]
Hey, class rep!
I…I heard what happened, to Midoriya. You holding up okay?
Where are you?

[Tenya]
Hosu General Hospital.

[Kirishima]
SDHFKJSDF
I must've just missed you, I'm sorry. I'll be there tomorrow, alright? Are you okay?

[Tenya]
I'm fine.

[Kirishima]
Dammit I can't really talk right now, running to the train station. I'll message you again once I'm on the train.

[Tenya]
If you must.

[KIRISHIMA is OFFLINE]

Tenya sets his phone on the table once again, and when the movement stretches his injuries for the second time, well, he ignores it. It's nothing compared to the pain he knows Midoriya must be feeling.

Three knocks sound from the other side of Tenya's hospital room, and Tenya jumps for a moment, not expecting it. "…Yes?" he says, keeping the tremble out of his voice.

The door opens, and there stands Todoroki. Tenya relaxes just a bit, but not by much. Todoroki steps into the room, pulling the door shut behind him; he's still wearing his hero costume, and there's a patch of gauze taped over his cheek, but he seems otherwise unharmed.

"Todoroki," Tenya says, blinking. "…Are you…?"

"I'm fine," Todoroki interrupts, and Tenya ignores the tremble in his voice. Todoroki raises his head to meet his gaze; the corners of his eyes are rimmed red. "What about you? How are your arms?"

“They’re fine.” And compared to the knife in Midoriya’s chest, they *are.*

“Midoriya’s going to be okay,” Todoroki says, probably just saying whatever comes to mind. “The doctor—”

“I know, I heard,” Tenya says, and he doesn’t mean to interrupt, but he really, really does not want Todoroki to continue. “He’ll be alright, right?”

Todoroki doesn’t answer. “Iida.”

“This is the second time,” Tenya says, breath catching in his throat. “The second time Midoriya has saved me. The first time…at the USJ, when the villains attacked…I wasn’t able to save him then. And now…he’s gravely wounded again, and it’s my fault.”

The silence that follows only adds weights to Tenya’s chest.

“…What do you want me to say, Iida?” Todoroki asks, voice tight, but not without bite. *“What do you want me to say?* I’m not going to stand here and tell you that it isn’t your fault, because we both know I’d be wrong. If you hadn’t gone after the the Hero Killer like you did, we wouldn’t be here right now.”

Todoroki doesn’t say it accusingly, doesn’t say it to hurt Tenya; it’s merely an observation, one Tenya agrees wholeheartedly with.

“…But…when it comes to being controlled by anger…”

Tenya raises his head; Todoroki looks the other way, fists balled at his sides.

“…It’s not like I have the right to preach to people,” Todoroki says.

Tenya swallows thickly. “Todoroki—”

“You can’t change what you did,” Todoroki interrupts. “You can’t change what happened to Midoriya. Life doesn’t have an ‘undo’ button. But…knowing what you know now…you *can* do everything in your power, to make sure it never happens again.”

Tenya’s eyes burn. In his mind, he knows Todoroki is right. He knows there’s nothing he can say or do that will change his going after the Hero Killer, that will change Midoriya’s jumping in front of him, that will change that silver, blood-coated blade protruding from his

friend's chest.

He knows it. He understands it.

But he clenches his fists as the tears break free, and all he can think about is *it's my fault. My fault. My fault.* He's aware of Midoriya's service dog standing by him, trying to get his attention, but he ignores the dog adamantly.

Midoriya…

…I'm so, so very sorry…

It went just as well as Shouto imagined it to go, and then he's leaving Iida's hospital room and heading back down the hall into the waiting room. Howler looks dejected, dragging himself by Shouto's side, but there isn't much he can do for the dog other than reach down and scratch his ears.

Toshinori-san is there—the odd, skeleton of a man "friend of the Midoriyas." He's speaking with the receptionist about something Shouto can't hear; when Toshinori catches him looking, the man smiles fragily and beckons him over, moving to meet him halfway.

"How are you holding up, my boy?" the man asks, and honestly? Shouto doesn't know him at all, but he feels like he should. There's something…pain-strikingly *familiar* about him, although Shouto can't place his finger on *what* or *why*.

"I'm alright," Shouto says, and he notices that the man is in slightly higher spirits now than before. "You…you saw Midoriya?"

The man smiles softly and nods again. "Yes, I did," he says. "He's resting. The doctors tell me they're moving him into a proper room tomorrow afternoon, so if you'd like to visit then, there's a better chance of you being able to."

Shouto's spirit soars (Midoriya would probably laugh at him for the accidental pun—or he'd respond by dropping out of his body so his spirit is *literally* soaring. Yeah, that seems like a far more Midoriya thing to do), and he nods. Howler's tail swishes the ground back and forth at his side.

…Oh. That reminds him.

“Excuse me, Toshinori-san…”

“Hmm?”

“What should...what should I do with Midoriya’s dog?” Shouto asks, glancing down at Howler. The dog looks back up at him, perkier than before, tongue lolling out of his mouth. “...I...I-I can’t really, stay here forever, but...I don’t...know what to do with him.”

Toshinori-san nods. “I could keep him with me,” he offers. “Izuku’s mother is on the way here, I’ll keep Howler with me until she gets here.”

Shouto nods almost immediately.

He leaves Howler with Toshinori and soon sets out for his father’s internship building once again. His father booked a hotel nearby (it was easier than finding adequate sleeping quarters in the building itself), so at least Shouto can go there and be alone. He has no doubt his father will be caught up in Hosu all night long, checking the area for lingering villains and helping the remaining civilians evacuate.

At least he’ll be alone, he thinks, when he reaches the hotel, finds his room, and promptly collapses face-first onto the bed without changing his clothes. But he’d be lying if he says that he doesn’t miss Uraraka’s hand on his forearm, Kirishima’s on his shoulder, and Howler’s weight against his leg.

He feels like his body is made of lead. Everything aches and even his eyelids feel too heavy when he cracks them open, squinting against the light that invades his senses. He feels... *drained,* like every bit of energy has been totally sapped from his body.

Izuku blinks groggily. His ears ring for a while, but eventually, he picks up the sound of a beeping heart monitor, the dull, gentle hum of an oxygen tank. He blinks a couple more times, swallowing reflexively. He tastes metal and acid in his throat.

What…

He makes a move to sit up, but immediately, a sharp pain stabs him right across the chest and has him falling limp against the bed again, gasping and heaving. Bile burns his throat, and he swallows it back with difficulty.

“Hey--hey, kiddo, can you hear me?”

Izuku’s vision is tilting and there are black splotches on the corners of his sight, but the voice in his head is all too clear.

“Y-Yeah,” he croaks, and his voice sounds bad even to him. Every breath feels like it grates against his throat, and the oxygen mask doesn’t exactly *help* his voice come out any clearer.

The ex-holders notice it, too.

“Oh, ouch, yeah, save your voice, boyo.”

“That sounds like it hurts.”

“Yeah, just rest for now, sweetheart. There’ll be time to talk later.”

“Sorry, my bad, kiddo--should’ve waited a while before I started asking questions…”

“S’okay,” Izuku manages, his temples throbbing. He doesn’t think he’s ever felt this horrible before in his life, which is definitely saying a lot.

But, he’s alive.

Somehow or another, he’s alive.

His eyes catch sight of something on the side table. His vision is blurry, and he’s still reeling from pain and nausea, but once his vision clears some, he realizes it’s his phone.

He blinks tiredly, brain still computing.

Then he grabs it off the side table.

Ding.

Shouto opens his eyes blearily; sunlight streams through the open window of the hotel, bright and near-blinding, and even though Shouto had had a near impossible time trying to fall asleep, once he *was* asleep, his body had...completely shut down. Even now that he’s awake, he feels like he’d just crawled out of his grave.

He reaches, fumbling for his phone on the bedside table. He blinks the remaining sleep out of his eyes, then looks down at the screen.

His eyes go wide.

[Chatroom: “INSERT CLEVER TITLE HERE”]

[Spearmint]
[attachment.photo]

Shouto sits up, suddenly wide awake. With shaking fingers, he opens the attachment.

It’s a picture of Midoriya, a selfie, actually, the dork. He looks blatantly *exhausted,* and honestly, more horrible than Shouto has ever seen him; there are dark, black and purple circles around his eyes, which lack their usual light, and his skin is a pasty white, which makes his freckles and that horrid scar more prominent than ever.

But even so, his face is split with a lopsided grin, and despite the exhausted, pained haze in his eyes, he’s holding up a turned peace sign to his temple.

[Spearmint]
I lived fools.

Chapter End Notes

> I'm gonna let this sit here for a bit, but I'll do my best to update soon!! :D Thank you all so much for your support, it really means the world to me ehrskfhkjsdf. :D
>
> Also, I wanted to mention that this story *does* have a solid end point. It'll probably reach abouuuuttt...30, maybe 40 chapters? But yes, it does have a solid end, in case anyone was wondering. :D Thanks again for everything you do for me and my stories, everyone!! :D
>
> Until next time, go beyond!! PLUS ULTRA!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

At the End of the Day

Chapter Summary

"At the End of the Day" from Les Misérables

“At the end of the day, there’s another day dawning,
And the sun in the morning is waiting to rise.”

Chapter Notes

ARTTTT \o/

citrophobia-242

chiangyorange

starrifically

hybridfandomgirl

And another one by hybridfandomgirl (Warning for blood/gore)

artforfics

THANK YOU ALL SM. Also, I replied to a decent chunk of comments last chapter, but I'm really sorry i didn't get to all of them!!! I'll try to do better. I love you guys!! Enjoy the chapter! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It's almost surreal, getting such a text from Midoriya considering the state he’d been in yesterday, but considering it’s, well, *Midoriya,* Shouto can’t really be surprised.

When he somehow manages to overcome the hurdle that is his shock at receiving a message from Midoriya, he comes up with a response.

[Thermostat]
You’re awake

(He can hear some inner Midoriya of his saying *“nailed it.”)*

[Spearmint]
i’m awaaaakeeee
it ain’t worht it fam believe me

***worth**

[Thermostat]
How do you feel?

[Spearmint]
Like i got hit by a heckin *truck*
i'd drop otu of the body if i could
***out**

[Gravity Falls]
DEKU!! YOU'RE OKAY!!

[Spearmint]
yeh sort of
I feel like *death*
anyway how u

[Gravity Falls]
Oh no. Are you in pain?? Do you think you should call for a doctor?

[Spearmint]
If it gets any worse i might
i'm fine now, though. chances are they'll confiscate my phone if they see me using it and i don't want them to do that

[Thermostat]
Midoriya, you should rest.

[Spearmint]
ill sleep when im dead
i just woke up

[Thermostat]
You look exhausted.

[Spearmint]
only cars get exhausted

[Gravity Falls]
That barely made sense.

[Spearmint]
guess i'm too *tired* to think of a betetr one ;)
sdfhkjdsf *better

[Thermostat]
You can barely type.
Go to sleep.

[Gravity Falls]
^^^
Please go to sleep, we'll come visit you later, okay? <3

[Spearmint]
But i just woke up
i wanna talk to you guys

[Thermostat]
Sleep.

[Spearmint]
no

[Thermostat]
Midoriya.

[Spearmint]
ill haunt you dont think i wont

[Thermostat]
Midoriya, you're in the hospital, recovering from a *literal stab wound* to the chest.
You need to sleep.

[Spearmint]
Oh no, oh no i'm ghosting again

[Thermostat]
Midoriya

[Spearmint]
Physicallll...functionsss...failinggg……

[Thermostat]
Midoriya please

[Gravity Falls]
Deku why

[Spearmint]

hsdfkjhioejlksdf

[Thermostat]
Are you serious.

[Spearmint]
[ghost.gif]
oh great im dead
AGAIN

[Thermostat]
[ghostbusters.gif]

[Gravity Falls]
Who u gunna call

[Spearmint]
hsdfkjsdhfiojeslkfjklsdf todorOKI WHY
trust broken
u have wounded me

[Thermostat]
Midoriya, go to sleep.

[Spearmint]
cut to the heart
and you're to blame

[Gravity Falls]
Deku now isn't the time. Go to sleep, okay?
We'll come by and visit later on. For now, you need to rest.

[Thermostat]
Seriously.

[Spearmint]
yeah i guess you're right
i feel pretty horirble, not gonna lie
***horibel**
HDFKJHSDKF

[Thermostat]
Case in point. Talk to you later.

[Spearmint]
kk

[SPEARMINT is OFFLINE]

[THE ROCK is ONLINE]

[The Rock]
BUDDY!!!
OH DAGNABBIT I MISSED HIM
But hey hospital visit??? I didn't sleep at all last night heksjhdjfkf, too busy worrying.

[Gravity Falls]
Honestly, same. Poor Deku. I'm glad he's doing better now, though.

[Thermostat]
The doctors mentioned moving him into a proper room this afternoon.
We could visit then?

[The Rock]
That works!! What time?

[Gravity Falls]
Maybe around 2pm? or maybe the next time Deku is online he can give us a good time.

[The Rock]
^^^ that works for me. Todoroki?

[Thermostat]
Yeah. See you all then. Meet outside the hospital?

[Gravity Falls]
[emoji.thumbs_up]

[The Rock]
[emoji.thumbs_up]

[GRAVITY FALLS is OFFLINE]

[THE ROCK is OFFLINE]

The next time Izuku wakes up, it's to fingers running through his hair.

He opens his eyes slowly, almost painfully slowly; his brain feels just as fuzzy as before, but he's not in nearly as much pain (or maybe

that's just because he hasn't moved yet; yeah, that's probably the reason), and he blinks for a bit to clear his vision.

Mom's face swims into view. Her features are drawn, and she looks more tired than Izuku has ever seen her; regardless, though, she smiles at him, and there are tears in her eyes.

Izuku manages to smile back at her. "H-Hey, Mom…"

His voice is still rough from blood and disuse, and Mom shushes him, shaking her head and smoothing his hair back off his face.

It's good to see her, he thinks, tiredly. The circumstances aren't ideal, but, it's good to see her. Especially now.

"They're moving you into a proper room in a little while," Mom says quietly, still stroking his hair. "How do you feel?"

"I-I…" Izuku has to think about it, which already isn't that good of a sign. "...I-I'm...g-getting there…"

She smiles, and the pain there is obvious. "I spoke with the doctor," she says gently. "They want to keep you for a week, just to make sure, but afterwards…"

Izuku nods—aaaaaand there goes the pain, straight through his temples. He swallows and forces himself not to wince, though he *does* grit his teeth behind his lips.

Mom notices. "Izuku?"

"I'm fine," Izuku manages, voice strained. The words feel like sandpaper against his throat. "J-Just...y-y'know, g-getting there…"

She nods, lips drawn into a thin line, and squeezes his fingers with the hand that isn't buried in his hair. He squeezes her fingers back whenever the pain hits, and they spend the rest of their time in silence.

As Izuku drifts off again, he wonders, briefly, and with a stab of worry, what became of Howler.

He wakes up when the doctors move him into a room; Mom says something about speaking with them, that she'll be back in a bit, but Izuku barely hears it. He sleeps for...he doesn't really know how long, and it doesn't feel like a natural sleep, either. Maybe it's just the pain

meds knocking him out, he doesn't know.

And honestly? It's annoying, being in a state caught somewhere between sleep and wake, but he'd rather feel this than whatever pain he *should* be feeling, without the painkillers.

Mom moved his things into the new room with him (his phone and his bell necklace, both of which had been on the side table in his other room), and he waited until the doctors were gone before reaching for his phone again. The light of the screen hurts his eyes and makes his temples throb, but he ignores it in favor of sending his message.

[Izuku]
i liveeeee

[Toshinori-san]
KID
Are you okay? How do you feel?
You should be resting, my boy.

[Izuku]
ive been resting i promise
i feeeeeellllll...okay? i'm mainly tired, right now.
the painkillers are making me tired.
i think.

[Toshinori-san]
It's good to hear from you.
I was worried.

[Izuku]
Yeah, i know. i saw your texts.
sorry i keep worrying you ehrskdjf.
i don't mean to i promise

[Toshinori-san]
I know you don't. Just, be more careful in the future, please.
I'm not sure my heart could take another scare.

[Izuku]
i'm sorry.

[Toshinori-san]
It's alright.
I have to speak with Naomasa down at the police station, but I'll be back to visit a little later on, alright?

[Izuku]
kk, yeah, whenevr you want is fine.
***whenever**
i'm pretty sure Todoroki, Uraraka and Kirishima are droppin by this afternoon, too, and my mom is here, so i'm not alone

[Toshinori-san]
Ahh, good. I'm glad.
I'll be there as soon as I can, alright, kiddo?
Try to get some rest until then.

[Izuku]
i will. :D

[TOSHINORI-SAN is OFFLINE]

It takes Shouto what feels like a forever to get himself ready, and anyway, they aren't meeting at the hospital until two; it's not like he's late and in a big rush to get there. Despite his thrill at seeing Midoriya, just confirming he's definitely alright, he's still exhausted and mentally drained, so he takes his time.

It's crazy to think it was just yesterday. It already feels like it's been an eternity since they battled the Hero Killer.

He showers, gets dressed, grabs his phone, and takes the elevator down to the ground floor of the hospital. As he's crossing the way toward the doors, his phone dings in his pocket.

The message isn't from the group chat; it's from Midoriya, specifically.

[Midoriya]
wait question

[Shouto]
Go back to sleep.

[Midoriya]
hsdfjshdkjf
IT'S BEEN HOURS THERMOSTAT WHY

[Shouto]
You were stabbed in the chest. Your argument is invalid. Go to sleep.
We'll see you in a little while, anyway. We can talk then.

[Midoriya]
i know but i have a question
do you know where Howler is?
i kind of...left him behind shdfkjshdfkdsf

Yeah, it makes sense why Midoriya would be worried about his dog, then. Shouto is already typing his response to let him know that Howler is fine, that he left him with Yagi Toshinori at the hospital,

And then the automatic doors of the hotel open for him.

Shouto blinks.

Howler blinks back at him innocently.

Shouto looks down the sidewalk one way, then down the sidewalk the other way. No one is there.

Shouto does a double-take; no, this is definitely Midoriya's dog. The same dog Shouto left at the hospital with Toshinori-san yesterday is is right here in front of him, tail swishing back and forth across the ground, dopey smile on his face.

Shouto breathes in deeply through his nose and exhales through his mouth. "I'm...not even gonna ask."

Howler's tongue lolls out of his mouth, and when Shouto starts on his way to the hospital, the dog is quick to follow him.

Shouto raises his phone again.

[Shouto]
[attachment.photo]
Does this answer your question?

[Midoriya]
HDSOIFJISKLEDSF
WH

[Shouto]
He was waiting for me outside the hotel.
I don't even know how he got here.

[Midoriya]
Howler you goofball i swear
Oh wait i have an idea. You walking?

[Shouto]
Yeah, what's up?

[MIDORIYA—VIDEO CALL: DECLINE / ACCEPT]

[REQUEST TIMED OUT]

[Midoriya]
OY

[Shouto]
I'm literally on my way to the hospital to see you.

[Midoriya]
I KNOW THAT BUT STILL

Shouto sighs heavily. Howler frowns at him, confused, and honestly, Shouto feels a little like he's being ganged up on. Eventually, he sends a response.

[Shouto]
Fine, fine, fine. Send it again, I'll answer.

[Midoriya]
ᕕ(ᐛ)ᕗ

[MIDORIYA—VIDEO CALL: DECLINE / ACCEPT]

True to his word, Shouto answers. The screen goes black for a little while, and then Midoriya comes into view.

He looks...better? Maybe? It's hard to tell. He's laying down on the hospital bed, holding his phone up over him, and even though he looks just as exhausted and dazed as he did in the picture he'd sent a few hours ago, there's more light in his eyes now.

"Hey, Thermostat!" Midoriya says, smiling, and although it's soft and nothing like his usual energetic, blinding smile, it's just as genuine. *"...Oh wow, you look exhausted."*

Shouto snorts. "Speak for yourself."

Midoriya looks away for a moment, like he's pondering this. *"Fair point. Anyway, is Howler there?"*

Shouto glances down. Howler is right by his side, though he's looking around, confused.

“Yeah, he’s here,” Shouto answers, turning around the phone. “Here.”

“Howler! Hey, buddy!”

Howler’s head snaps up *instantly,* and that’s about all the warning Shouto gets before he’s slammed into by fourty-some pounds of fluffy, energetic border collie, and his phone is knocked right out of his hands while he himself is knocked right to the ground.

It doesn’t hurt much; he’s more startled than anything, and Howler hops off him in favor of finding his phone.

Midoriya is *cackling,* and around his laughter Shouto can hear him asking, *“Y-You okay, Thermostat?”* while Howler licks at the screen and barks once or twice.

Shouto sits up, winces at what he knows are going to be bruises by the end of the day, then reaches over and grabs his phone. Howler is too busy prancing around and barking excitedly to notice.

“Your dog is insane.”

Midoriya laughs harder, and Howler spins in happy little circles, occasionally stopping, crouching and barking at the phone in Shouto’s hands. Shouto clears away the majority of the slobber with the hem of his shirt, though he doesn’t get all of it.

“H-Honestly, are you okay there?”

“Yeah. My phone got mauled, but anyway…”

“Hey, Howler!”

The dog perks up immediately, and Shouto holds out the phone for Howler to see before he’s tackled again.

“I’ll see you in a bit, okay, buddy? Take care of Thermostat!”

Howler boofs at him, to which Midoriya responds by laughing hoarsely, though it breaks off into a cough a second later.

“W-Well, I’ll let you go. See you in a little while.”

“See you, Midoriya.”

Shouto hangs up, then rises to his feet. Howler spins around him, looking positively ecstatic, and it’s hard to stay upset with him.

“You wanna go see Midoriya?”

Howler barks at him.

“Alright, then let’s go.”

Shouto starts down the sidewalk (or, continues down, more like), and Howler sprints into the lead, looking back every now and then to make sure Shouto is still following.

When he arrives at the hospital, Uraraka and Kirishima are waiting for him outside, looking in much higher spirits than yesterday. Kirishima is the first to notice Shouto’s approach, raising a hand and hollering a cheerful greeting.

“Yo, Todoroki! You made it!”

Shouto nods, stepping up with Howler. The four of them head into the hospital shortly afterwards; Uraraka and Kirishima already have visitor badges, so they must’ve been here for a little while already, before Shouto got here. Howler isn’t wearing his vest, but the receptionist recognizes him from yesterday, and she smiles softly as she slides Shouto’s visitor badge across the table to him.

“Room thirty six, down the hall that way.” She points. “Good luck.”

Shouto and Uraraka bow shortly; Kirishima has to be nudged before he remembers to do the same; and they they turn and start down the hall towards Midoriya’s room.

Shouto’s eyes linger on room 27 and the nameplate on the wall beside it that reads *Iida Tenya* for an extra moment. It occurs to him that Kirishima and Uraraka probably don’t even know he’s here.

“Do you guys know where Iida is?” Uraraka asks as though she’d read his thoughts. Her brows are drawn with concern. “I haven’t seen him in the group chat for a while now…”

“He was injured in the attack as well,” Shouto answers.

Kirishima and Uraraka round him. “WHAT!?”

“He’s alright,” Shouto goes on, walking forward; when the two of them get over their shock, they follow, flanking Shouto and Howler on either side. “He just...needs time, I imagine. He’ll come around.”

I hope.

"For now," Shouto says—he *almost* misses room 36, and double-checks the nameplate to make sure it's the right one. It is. "Let's...let's just...do one thing at a time."

Kirishima and Uraraka exchange concerned glances, but Shouto knows that visiting Iida at this point won't do anything. There's a reason Iida hasn't been active in the group chat, a reason he's separating himself. For now, Shouto will leave him alone, let him sort out his thoughts, a lot like Shouto had had to do following the Sports Festival.

If Iida's distancing gets any worse, though, something might have to be done.

Howler is scratching at the bottom of the door, whining frantically.

"Howler?" Midoriya's voice comes from the other side of the door, and Howler's head cocks to one side, eyes zeroing in on the crack in the door—and then he paws at it again, tail swishing back and forth.

Shouto takes a breath, then reaches out and opens the door.

Howler charges in immediately, and by the time Shouto, Uraraka and Kirishima step into the room after him, the dog is already on the bed, and Midoriya is laughing weakly and pushing him back.

"Y-Yeah, I'm okay, I'm okay! Aww, did you miss me?" Howler responds by licking his face several times, to which Midoriya laughs. "I know, I know, I missed you too…"

Midoriya is still laying down, and Howler is standing almost directly over him, though he's calmed down some since first coming in and isn't licking Midoriya's face anymore. Midoriya gets an arm around Howler's back and pulls him down; Howler flops over on the bed to Midoriya's left, then nuzzles his head beneath his chin. Howler is careful to avoid Midoriya's chest, Shouto realizes a second later.

It's...nice, seeing Midoriya smile like that again, with such light and life. He still looks terrible, and there's this deep exhaustion ebbed in his eyes, but with time, even that will fade.

It takes another second for Midoriya to realize that he isn't alone. He lifts his gaze (not his head, just his eyes), and when he sees Shouto, Uraraka and Kirishima still by the door, he smiles again.

“Yo,” he says, still beaming, even as his voice cracks.

Any trace of made-up tension between the three of them disperses like it’d never even existed, and shortly thereafter finds them across the room by Midoriya’s bed. Uraraka sits down on the edge of the bed; Shouto takes a stool; and Kirishima drags up a chair from the other side of the room and sits on it, backwards, so he’s still facing Midoriya but can use the back of the chair as an armrest.

“How ya doin’, buddy?” Kirishima asks.

“I’m…” Midoriya takes in a breath, pondering. “...I’m doing okay, right now. Just...tired, mostly, but, I’m doing okay.”

“That’s good,” Uraraka says, smiling softly. “I’m glad you’re okay, Deku. We were…” She looks down at her hands, but doesn’t falter. “...We were worried.”

Something floods Midoriya’s eyes—something like realization, guilt, concern—and when he smiles again, it’s softer, more apologetic.

“Sorry,” he says. “I didn’t mean to, you know...scare you guys…”

“S’okay, buddy,” Kirishima says, shaking his head. “We know you didn’t, y’know, *set out* to scare the living daylights outta us, just...be more careful in the future, got it?”

Midoriya smiles, then nods. He cuts the movement short with a wince, though he makes light work of hiding it. “Yeah...it’d be nice if villains would stop trying to kill me, though. A-at this point…”

Something in Midoriya’s voice changes. They all pick up on it.

“Don’t,” Shouto says, meeting his eyes.

“Deku, why.”

“Buddy.”

“I’m pretty sure everyone’s taken a *stab* at it by now.”

The groan is collective. Uraraka shakes her head feverishly, Shouto just, *sighs,* and even though Kirishima is usually supportive of Midoriya’s jokes, right now he looks like he’s been betrayed and can’t believe what’s going on.

“H-Hey, I lived, I can make jokes about it!” Midoriya says, cracking a

smile at his own stupid pun.

Shouto sighs. He doesn't really know what possess him to do it (maybe it's relief, maybe it's Midoriya's positive energy, maybe it's just *Midoriya),* but he finds himself saying, "Yeah, it's no wonder the Hero Killer was glaring *daggers* at you."

Midoriya flat-out *cackles* while Uraraka shrieks "Todoroki!!" and Kirishima looks caught between laughing and, well, staring in horror.

"I-I-I didn't know you c-could make jokes," Midoriya says, still grinning. "G-Guess you learn something new every—"

His voice breaks off into a pained hiss, eyes squeezing shut, hands clenching into fists. Howler is the first to react, head snapping up, nose bumping Midoriya's cheek lightly.

And then Kirishima, Shouto and Uraraka are on their feet, hovering by him. Uraraka settles her hand over his while Kirishima reaches out and touches his ankle; Shouto doesn't remember moving, but his hand is on Midoriya's shoulder a second later.

It doesn't last long. Midoriya rides out the pain, takes in a shuddering breath, then lets it out slowly, cracking his eyes open again. He smiles at the three of them in turn, but his eyes are dull again.

"I-I'm okay," he breathes. "S-Sorry…"

Uraraka squeezes his fingers. "It's fine. Sorry, maybe we should've waited a few more days before coming to see you…"

Midoriya shakes his head. "N-No, I'm glad you came today," he says, smiling first at her, then at Kirishima, then at Shouto. "A-All of you. I-I'm…s-still getting there, but, I'll…I-I'll be okay."

"And we'll be here for it every step of the way," Kirishima says lightly, but honestly, and Midoriya shuts his eyes and lets out a small sigh of contentment.

"T-Thanks."

They don't stay much longer, after that. They bid their farewells, and after the second fruitless attempt to call Howler to them, they make a universal, unspoken decision to leave him there. Besides, it's not just Howler who doesn't want to leave Midoriya's side; Midoriya has his fingers buried in Howler's fur with white knuckles. There's no way

they can pry that dog away from Midoriya now; they'd feel like the worst human beings alive if they tried.

So they don't. They say goodbye more times than necessary, then head out with a promise to come back again tomorrow—a promise they all intend on keeping.

The ex-holders are quiet; Izuku asked them to be quiet, not just for the duration of his visit with his friends (he wanted to give them his complete attention—or, as much attention as he had with a brain fogged by pain and medications), but also, until his head stopped feeling like someone was driving knives into it.

Izuku generally appreciates their company, but, the thought of seven different voices going back and forth in his head just...ack, just *thinking* about it makes the pounding in his skull go up a notch.

Now that his friends have come and gone and he doesn't have nearly as deep and horrible an ache to see them, he feels drained again, his energy gone. He shuts his eyes and leans his cheek against the top of Howler's head; the dog is a comforting warmth, and even though he has *no idea* how Howler found Todoroki at his hotel, well, he isn't complaining.

And then he thinks about Iida.

He opens his eyes again. It isn't a realization, isn't jarring, it's just a thought that's been on the backburner of his mind for a long time now, ever since he first sent that picture of him into the group chat earlier today.

He hasn't heard from Iida whatsoever, and it doesn't really surprise him as much as it hurts him. He hadn't even thought about it while it was happening; he was too concerned with just *being there* to shield Iida from the knife aimed at his heart, but now that that's over and done with and he's recovering, now that the panic is gone…

He can't *imagine* what Iida is feeling.

He knows Iida is okay—probably in this hospital, too, most likely, considering the stab-wounds he'd had when Izuku arrived at the scene —which is good, sure, but…

He sighs and leans back against the pillows, his head *pounding.* The burn in his chest comes and goes at random intervals, but the

throbbing, stabbing in his skull is always there, and it's nauseating, tedious and exhausting all at once.

He shuts his eyes and drags in a shuddering breath through his mouth, exhaling the same way. He'll talk to Iida, soon. He'll talk to Iida. He'll talk to Iida…

He reaches over and snatches his phone off the side table.

[Izuku]
Hey, it's me.
I'm alive! :D
Still in the hospital but, you know.
How are you?

There is no response.

Izuku *supposes* it makes sense; maybe Iida doesn't have his phone on him, maybe he's sleeping, maybe—

Oh.

No, the messages are coming up as "read."

Izuku frowns. *So Iida sees them, he just…isn't responding.*

[Izuku]
How are your arms?
Hey. Iida.
Say something.

"Read," says Izuku's messages to Iida.

But he gets no response.

[Izuku]
I know you're reading this.
Say something.
Iida. We need to talk.
If you aren't going to respond to my texts, can you at least tell me whether or not you'll come visit?
I mean, you're in the hospital, same as me, but. Or maybe I can visit you?
Iida seriously, say something.

He receives no response, and without meaning to, he ends up drifting back off to sleep.

It could be fifteen minutes or fifteen hours for all he knows, in between closing and opening his eyes. He assumes it's closer to the latter, though not nearly as long; the sun is setting, orange and yellow light flooding the hospital room, and Izuku's eyes fall on the figure of his mentor standing just in front of the door.

"...T-Toshinori-san," he rasps, and even though the word burns his throat, it's easier to talk now than before. The pounding in his head has gone down, *some*— not completely gone, just lesser, after he slept —but right now, it isn't more than he can ignore.

Toshinori is on the other side of the room before Izuku can even register him taking the first step. The man reaches out, settling his hand on Izuku's forehead; Izuku blinks twice at him, confused, and Toshinori lets out a small sigh, sinking down onto the chair Todoroki had occupied earlier.

"Your fever broke," Toshinori says quietly, and he smiles, if faintly. "How're you feeling, kiddo?"

Izuku returns the small but honest smile with energy he doesn't have. "Aside from, just...wanting to sleep all the time, I-I think I'm okay."

He doesn't bring up his aching head or the burn in his chest whenever he shifts wrong; he figures these are things he'll just have to get used to dealing with throughout the recovery process.

Toshinori nods. "You gave us all quite the scare, my boy. It's nice to see you awake again."

"I-It's nice to see you, too, T-Toshinori-san." A pause. "...My mom didn't slap you again, did she?"

Toshinori chuckles lightly, then shakes his head. "No, she didn't. I was expecting her to for a moment, when she first came in, but she didn't."

Izuku beams, although he's not sure it quite reaches his eyes.

Toshinori's visit doesn't last nearly as long as Izuku thought or hoped it would, but then again, Izuku's exhaustion is hard to miss; he has no doubt his mentor can tell by his tone of voice, by his eyes, just how blatantly tired he really is.

Toshinori leaves, eventually, and, like Izuku's friends, promises to come back and visit. Izuku thanks him, Toshinori ruffles his hair and tells him to get some rest, then leaves the room, shutting the door gently behind him.

Izuku leans back against the pillows again, shutting his eyes. He isn't on oxygen anymore, although the heart monitor is still there, beeping dutifully beside him, and that's fine. The wires are extremely annoying, and the stickers against his skin seem to be taking his discomfort as a challenge, but either way, it's only a matter of time before they're gone, before he's out of the hospital.

He'll get there, eventually. He'll get there. He'll get there, and he'll find some way to talk to Iida in person, since he isn't answering his messages.

The last thing he hears is quiet, hushed voices in his head, wishing him a goodnight, and even though their voices don't exactly *help* his pounding head, the comfort they bring is worth it.

He's running.

There's a crash, there's a scream, but he runs on anyway, blood pumping, heart pounding. Something is wrong, something is horribly wrong and he's running towards it. He's running towards it. He can't stop, he can't slow down; one second late, one second too long—

He leaps over a collapsed building with a familiar warmth spreading through him; upon landing, he bends his knees, tucks, rolls, then springs to his feet again and keeps running, faster.

Faster.

Faster.

Faster.

I can't believe it's already happening.

Faster.

There's no way, there's no way, dammit, be wrong, be wrong, be wrong—

Faster.

Please don't—

Faster.

*I'm not **ready.***

He turns the corner and skids to a stop. Civilians are running in all directions, dispersing; screams fill the air, flames fill his line of sight. Smoke clouds the sky, and even if it was *midday,* he gets the feeling the sky would *still* be black, as it is now.

There is no light aside from the flames, no *real thing* except for the fear within him, except for the screams around him—

Except for the man standing in the midst of the chaos, conducting it all.

I'm not ready.

He drags in a deep breath, holds it long enough for his head to spin, then lets it out, slowly. Very, very slowly.

But…

"Hey, All For One."

The man raises his head towards him, turns. He fills with fear from his heart to his mind, but…

"Interesting," All For One says, turning. "Where is your mentor, boy? Kibō?"

He grits his teeth. Just hearing his mentor's name spoken by this *monster* is enough to make him want to punch a building into dust.

"She should be the one to fight me," All For One goes on painstakingly slowly, "and yet...she sends you, a *child…"*

He laughs, and he only does it to hide how blatantly terrified he really is. "My mentor?" His voice trembles, his breath shakes, but he keeps talking anyway. "She isn't here right now. There's only me, and you know something?"

He shifts into a stance—he's learned this, practiced this, harnessed this before he harnessed One For All.

"...I'm going to beat you, All For One," Dai says, face splitting into a grin. "As long as I'm here...as long as I'm the only thing that stands in between these people and *you...* then I'm gonna stay here. Nothing

you do can make me run away from this."

Kibō-sensei…

…I'm—

All For One grins at him. He can't see his eyes, but he can imagine what they look like. He doesn't like it.

"I see," All For One says, raising a hand towards him. "In that case, child…if this is really what you want…you'll die just like my brother. You'll die just like Yukō. And your mentor…she'll die, just like *you.*"

Something snaps within him.

"Burn in hell!"

He runs. With every pounding footstep that tingles his senses, with every ember that flies up in front of his face, with every heavy gasp of smoke that leaves him breathless, he knows.

He knows.

I'm not ready.

He runs, and his eyes burn, and this time it has nothing to do with the smoke.

I'm not ready.

A mixture of sweat and tears pour down his face.

I'm not ready.

But—

"Run!" he screams at the civilians, balling his fists, firing up this cultivated power with which he's been entrusted. *"Run, all of you! I'll hold him back, just get out of here!"*

He slams his fists into the ground with all his might.

The ground breaks and trembles like it'd been struck with a horrid earthquake, cement and asphalt cracking and splintering, but he doesn't let up. All For One is barely fazed by the attack, launching his own. A blast of something throws him off his feet and slams him into the side of a half-crumbling, burning building; his ears ring with

blood, but he gets his feet underneath him again.

Run.

Run.

Run.

It's only you. No one else is coming. You're the only one.

You're the only one.

Dammit, Dai, you're the only one! Fight him!

Even if it costs you everything—!

"You're foolish, child."

"Shut up!" Dai screams, running at him again. He's blasted off his feet again. He doesn't even manage to get a good hit in before he's rolling on the ground again, trying in vain to get his feet beneath him as soon as possible.

He runs again.

He's blasted off his feet.

There's blood in his eyes, blood in his throat, blood running down the sides of his face. He chokes on a mixture of tears, sweat and blood, and then he's running again, because he's the only thing that stands between all these people and this murdering psycho.

Stall.

Stall.

Stall.

Long enough for them to get out of here.

Stall.

Stall.

Stall.

With every blast, with every unsuccessful hit, his tears redouble. He's slammed into the ground, broken by his own hit, and he screams, and

he feels his ribs snap, feels the blood on his face, feels the tears and sweat and—

"I'm giving you One For All."

"What? ...But, I'm—I-I don't have a Quirk, why would you—"

"You're the one, Dai. I wouldn't say that to you if I didn't mean it."

Dai grits his teeth. *No—!*

He scrambles to his feet and takes off again, running fast, then faster. One For All feels like fire, and he's using more than what he knows is safe, but he doesn't care. It doesn't matter.

"I won't lie to you, Dai. Us holders, the ones of us who carry One For All...we may as well be cursed. There's a villain, a villain named All For One, an 'anti'-us, so to say, and someday...we all must face him. My predecessor fought him, and his predecessor before that. The ones of us who hold this power...it is our destiny to face this great evil."

"Don't worry, I ain't scared of him! I swear, whenever that time comes, Kibō-sensei, I'll be ready! Hell, we'll face him together, even! We can do it, I believe in us!"

He runs. He runs, and in his heart, he knows that it's pointless. He knows that there's nothing he can do. He knows that he isn't ready, knows that someone like him, who'd only carried this borrowed power for a little while, has no chance.

But still.

Even so.

Even if I have no chance…

All For One is launching another attack. He runs to meet it, terrified, but resolved.

...Even if I die screaming…

"Come at me, All For One!" he shrieks, with courage he doesn't have.

...I have to do it.

"Hey, Aki, wanna hear something cool?"

"Uhh...sure…?"

Dai grits his teeth tighter, hard enough to make his head pound. In the back of his mind, he doesn't want to do this. He doesn't want to run at All For One. He doesn't want to die. He doesn't want to say goodbye to Kibō, to Aki, to his mom, to his family, to his friends—
Do it for them.
The words strike him, and once they hit home, well…
He runs. He's slammed into the ground. He gets up again. His arm snaps when he lands on it wrong but he gets up again anyway.

He runs. He falls. He's blasted off his feet. He breaks. He screams. He *sobs.*

But he gets up and runs. Runs and keeps running, fast and then faster, one foot after the other. He fires off blasts when he can, tries keeping All For One engaged, but there's nothing he can do, not with this measly strength, not with this power he hasn't fully made his own.

Adrenaline burns through his veins like poison, and he runs, screams, leaps, balls his fists—

He doesn't know what happens. Pain explodes through every inch of him; he feels something sharp, something *burning,* something so excruciating he forgets to breathe long enough to make the corners of his sight turn black.

All For One's fingers are around his throat, tight then tighter. Maybe that's more the reason why he can't breathe, along with the pain. Maybe that's why. Maybe—

There's a giant spike of cement, shot straight through his back and out his chest.

It hurts, but...his horror and fear surpasses that pain, for a time.

All For One smiles at him, close to his face. "My dear boy," he says, shaking his head. "Poor child...forced to fight me before his time…"

He grits his teeth. He feels blood spill between the cracks. *"I wasn't forced to do a damn thing,"* he snarls around the blood gathering and rising in his throat and mouth. "W-What I did...I did...because *I chose to."*

All For One nods, fingers tight around his throat, but not tight enough to completely block off his airway. "It's a shame, then," he says. "I'll

let you take responsibility."

He lets go. Of him, of the spike, and he falls, hitting the ground in a heap. He's choking and gasping and he can't breathe, even now. He feels strangled, choked, and overall, he's *scared.*

He's scared. More scared than he's ever been before in his life. More scared than he'll ever *be.*

"ai...ai...Dai!"

He lifts his head, barely, blood matting his hair. All For One is gone, he *ran,* but that's not important now. Dai held him off long enough. Dai *was* enough.

And now…

Though eyes blurred with tears, Dai sees his predecessor running towards him through the mess of broken road and crumbled buildings. Her eyes are full of horror, and right on her heels is Aki, close behind.

Kibō reaches him first, slamming to her knees at his side, and soon follows Aki right beside her. Kibō's eyes search him, lingering on the hole in his chest, widening in realization once she realizes—

"Dai," she gasps, and she rips off her cape—blue, like her eyes—and presses it against the gaping wound in his chest. Dai hisses, grits his teeth, then can't take it anymore and cries out; Aki's hand finds his and squeezes, and Dai clutches him desperately, blood choking him, pain overwhelming him.

"Hold on, Dai," Aki says, and...huh, he's crying. They'd been friends ever since they were little and Dai has never seen him cry before. "Just, hang in there, okay? *S-Shit…"*

He knows how bad it is. They all do. Dai included. He feels an overwhelming *pain,* and it isn't just from the wound in his chest.

Actually, it's mostly *not* from the wound in his chest. He's so numb right now that he barely feels anything.

"A-Aki…"

His voice is choked, and blood spills down his chin, but he keeps going.

"I-I...I-I w-want you to take it," he hacks. "O-One For All. T-T-Take it.

P-Please.”

Aki’s eyes go wide, and he shakes his head feverishly. “D-Don’t say that,” he says adamantly, squeezing Dai’s hand. “Don’t say that, Dai, buddy, c’mon…”

“Y-You know as well as I do t-that…” He pauses, coughs, gasps, heaves. Chokes. “...T-That...I-I’m n-not…”

Kibō squeezes his shoulder. He doesn’t look at her face; it’s already hard enough as it is, keeping himself pulled together.

“I-I know it’s not ideal,” he hacks, “and...I-I know i-it’s...i-it’s not...n-not what anyone wants, b-but...A-Aki, y-you...have to. I trust you more than anyone else. I-If anyone has to take it...I-I...I-I want it to be you.”

He’s fading. He feels himself fading, feels his grip on the world slipping. He reaches out and tries grasping it again, but it’s like he’s clawing at the air. There’s nothing for him to grab. There’s nothing for him to hold onto.

He chokes on a sob, tears mingling with the blood, dust, and sweat on his face.

I wasn’t ready.

But…

...I still…

Dark closes in.

No, wait…

The reality slams into him like a truck.

...Wait, I…

I don’t want…

...I don’t want to die…

...Please…

There’s so much more I want to do, there’s so much more I want to be. *I don’t want it to end. Please. I don’t want—*

I don't—

Please, don't —

I'm sorry…!

Izuku feels like he's being burned alive. He can't open his eyes, can't breathe, can't move. Through his ringing ears he hears something, a scream; maybe it's coming from him.

He hears barking. There's business around him, frantic movements and he's being pinned down by the shoulders, something is wrestled over his head to rest over his nose and mouth and he can breathe but he can't think, he can't, he can't, he *can't*—

"Get the doctor in here!"

"Hand me that sedative, hurry!"

"Hold him—!"

He sees blood in his mind's eye, blood and Dai's body and Aki and Kibō, and in his heart he feels an ache, a burn, a rush, *pain.* He feels pain within and without, feels tears on his face, mingling with sweat, and a crushing weight settles on his burning chest and *no, I wasn't ready, I wasn't ready, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, everyone, Aki, Kibō,* everyone—

He feels something in his arm; a prick, a sting. The images in his mind vanish in a rush of black, and an icy cold sensation chases away the fiery poison in his veins. Black overwhelms his senses, and he falls into an unnatural, gaping abyss.

"I'm sorry, but Midoriya Izuku had an episode yesterday evening and is not accepting visitors."

Shouto swears his world spins for a second.

"What do you mean?" Uraraka asks at once, though her voice shakes a bit. "W-We...w-we saw him yesterday, he was fine, h-how…"

"I thought he was getting better," Kirishima voices, and it sounds like he's torn between talking to the receptionist and himself. "We saw him yesterday. We...we joked and laughed, we talked about dumb crap, what do you mean he's…?"

The receptionist bites her lip, then shakes her head. “I don’t know much,” she says, “just, a strict word from the doctor. I know how much you care about your friend, and I know how hard this must be for the three of you, but you...you can’t see him, not today.”

“Not...not *today?”* Kirishima’s eyes are wide. *“How bad is he?”*

“I don’t have all the details,” the receptionist says, sounding torn. “He’s still in the same room as yesterday, but if he gets much worse, they’re considering moving him back to the ICU.”

Shouto almost can’t believe what he’s hearing. It’s like Uraraka and Kirishima said; Midoriya had been *okay* yesterday, still in pain but smiling, laughing, even making stupid puns about his own injury.

How had things gotten worse so suddenly? And *why?*

“D-Do you, I-I mean...do you have any idea when we’ll be able to see him again?” Uraraka strains, saying what they’re all thinking. “A-And...and whether or not he’ll be okay?”

“The doctor is hopeful,” is the answer. “He doesn’t think Midoriya’s life is in immediate danger, granted he doesn’t worsen. As for when you can see him...I honestly can’t say for sure. You’re welcome to stay here as long as you want, just in case something changes.”

The three of them exchange glances and then, in unspoken, universal agreement, they nod to each other, then turn back to the receptionist.

“We’ll stay,” Kirishima says.

The receptionist nods. “I assumed as much,” she says. “There’s a hospitality ward down the hall, that way.” She points, and they follow her finger. “If something changes, I’ll let you know.”

“Thank you,” Uraraka says, bowing, and the movement is seconded by Shouto and Kirishima before they head down the hallway together.

They stay there all day.

Izuku wakes up alone in the darkness, the familiar feeling of tubes and wires shifting against his skin. He feels drained, exhausted, even more so than earlier, but there’s a dull, burning ache in his chest that hadn’t been there before, and he feels dry tear tracks on his face.

He remembers, in an instant, just why they’re there.

“Hey, kid, can you—kid!”

Izuku sits up, gasping, and his chest *burns.*

It isn’t dull, it isn’t faint; the burn is *violent* and *agonizing,* and it takes every thread of willpower to not cry out. He rides out the pain impatiently, clutching his chest, squeezing his eyes shut as the tears break free again.

It does not end quickly, nor does it end *fully,* but the pain dissipates to the point where he’s able to think with a semblance of coherency.

There’s an oxygen mask over his face again, but it barely helps him breathe anymore. By his bedside, he hears his heart monitor pick up speed, the beeps faster and louder as he fights for breath and tries to ignore the ever present pain in his chest and temples.

He feels like someone’s dropped hot coals into his wound. He feels like someone dropped hot coals into his *heart.*

He hears the ex-holders, faintly, their voices overlapping each other in their panic. He makes out the words *calm* and *breathe* but that’s about it; the rest of it is lost with his own feelings, with his own pain, with his own mind.

He thinks about Dai. He thinks about that stake through his chest. He thinks about Aki, about Kibō, about the people who loved Dai. About the people who sat with him, helpless, while he bled out, while he fought to breathe, while he fought to *live* and ultimately *failed.*

And then he thinks about Iida. And he thinks about the Hero Killer’s knife, intended for him. And he thinks about himself. And he thinks about Tensei. And he thinks about Shouto, and Iida’s parents, and Uraraka, and Kirishima, and--

He’s moving. It hurts and burns but he’s moving. The back of his mind says *no, don’t move, don’t move, you’re in the hospital, don’t move* but he doesn’t even care right now.

One by one, he tears off the wires connecting him to his heart monitor. The monitor flat lines, the monotone beep ringing through his ears, and his oxygen mask goes next, followed by the IV; he ignores the drops of blood that begin beading and rolling down his fingers.

“Izuku, stop!”

“Dammit kid, you’re recovering, cut it out!”

The rest of it is swallowed up again by the rest of the ex-holders. They’re all angry, they’re all yelling at him, but he tunes it out as best he can, gritting his teeth against the pain. He swings his legs off the side of the hospital bed and slides onto his feet.

His vision tilts, his chest burns, and his stomach twists, but he hardly cares. No, he *doesn’t* care; there’s something he has to do, somewhere he has to go, and he drags himself across the room to the door, stumbling, barely able to keep his feet underneath him. His vision swirls, and the ground looks like jello beneath him, but—

Something sinks into his wrist.

It doesn’t hurt, but it’s enough to get his attention. Howler’s eyes are on him, light reflecting in the dog’s irises from the light of the moon through the hospital window.

Izuku really, really can’t breathe, but it doesn’t matter. He shakes Howler’s teeth off his forearm, and the dog lets go, though he doesn’t look happy.

“I-I’ll be back,” Izuku promises. “T-There’s s-something...something I have to do, first…”

Howler doesn’t look convinced, at all, which Izuku guesses is only fair, considering he’d promised to be back once before and broke said promise. Howler snags his ankle the next time he takes a step, but again, it doesn’t hurt, and since he’d been expecting it, it doesn’t even startle him.

The ex-holders are *screaming* at him, furious, worried, but Izuku tunes them out. He swings open the door, shakes Howler’s teeth off his ankle again, then shuts it behind him, leaving Howler behind.

He finds himself in the hallway; the nameplate beside his room reads *Midoriya Izuku,* and Izuku has no idea where he’s going or if he’s going the right direction, but he moves, one hand sliding against the wall, the other clutching his chest.

He checks each nameplate as he passes.

It’s a lovely night, Tenya thinks. Or, it would be, if he wasn’t viewing it from a hospital window. If Midoriya wasn’t in the same hospital on

the same night.

He's been ignoring Midoriya's texts; his phone sits on the side table by his bed across the room, where it's been since yesterday. Midoriya sent him a load of texts then but hasn't said anything since; Tenya had ignored him, not because he didn't, well, *want* to talk, but because…

Well…

Just what the hell is he supposed to *say?* What the hell *could* he say? A weight sits on his chest, and it's *been there* ever since the doctor told him Midoriya would be making a full recovery. The weight won't leave, and Tenya can't get rid of it, and the thought of talking to Midoriya, even through *texts* on a *screen,* makes that weight all the heavier.

He wants to be rid of it, but at the same time, he feels like he deserves it, this weight, this crushing feeling. Maybe he—

The door bangs the wall behind him, and startled, he spins around.

Midoriya stands in the doorway, head down, locks of hair blocking his eyes from view. He's breathing heavily, hand still flat against the door from when he'd thrown it open; his other hand clutches the door frame on the opposite side of the hinges, white-knuckled.

Tenya blinks. "Midoriya."

This…this shouldn't be happening. Midoriya shouldn't be here, he should be in his room recovering, he *shouldn't be here*—

Midoriya takes a step forward into the room, then another. And another. And another. His walk turns brisker, faster.

"Midoriya, what are you—"

Midoriya's fist slams into his jaw, and his head snaps to the side, back slamming into the windowsill. It doesn't hurt as much as it would if Midoriya was in better health, or if he was using his Quirk, but still; the hit is enough to genuinely shake him, and he has no doubt it will leave a nasty bruise.

Midoriya steps back, breathing heavily, chest heaving. He raises his head finally, and Tenya sees so many things in his eyes. He sees pain, he sees fear, he sees *anger.*

But the most obvious thing is *hurt,* redoubled by the tears rolling down his cheeks.

"You have no right to give me *the cold shoulder here, Iida!"* Midoriya shrieks at him, and Tenya watches, wide-eyed. "Ignoring my texts, shutting me out…what gives you the *right!?"*

Tenya cradles his jaw in one hand, still reeling. "Midoriya, I—"

"Do you have *any idea* how scared I was!?" Midoriya shouts, his voice slamming into Tenya's face until he feels almost physically pinned to the wall. "When I got there, the alley, and *Stain—"*

He stops, taking in a long, shuddering breath. His chest heaves, and in the moonlight, Tenya can see sweat beading on his forehead.

"Midoriya, you need to—"

"Five seconds!" Midoriya screeches instead of listening, and the back of Tenya's head hits the wall, not because he was physically shoved, but because of the tone of Midoriya's voice. Desperate, broken, pleading, strained with pain and tears. *"Five seconds—hell,* one *second! That's all it would've taken for Stain to drive that sword into you!"*

Tenya opens his mouth, but he can't find his voice. He can't find words worth saying. His mind is blank.

"What was I supposed to *do,* Iida!?" Midoriya demands, voice breaking, tears flying when he stumbles, managing to steady his footing just in the nick of time. "What was I supposed to do if I was too late? What about your brother, Tensei? What about your family? Do you really think they could handle another tragedy, Iida!?"

Tenya has thought about this. Many times. Just not… *prior* to hunting down Stain.

He pushes himself off the wall, finally regaining some sense of composure. "Midoriya," Tenya tries again, because he really, *really* doesn't like how pale Midoriya is, how glassy his eyes have become. "Midoriya, please—"

"I was there for you, Iida!"

Tenya stops, and the breath is gone from his throat again.

"I was there for you!" Midoriya drives home, tears redoubling. *"I was*

there for you, we were all *there for you! You could have talked to one of us! You could have told us how you felt! We could've helped you, I-Iida, so w-why—!"*

His voice breaks. His eyes cloud over.

"W-Why…"

His knees buckle.

"Midoriya!"

Tenya barely makes it there in time, and even then, he has to skid and slam to his knees, arms outstretched, in order to catch him. Midoriya is dead weight in his arms, shoulders heaving, heart pounding against his chest.

He puts aside his personal thoughts and fears for a moment and reaches over with one hand and spams the *Call Nurse* button on the edge of the bed, stopping only when he's absolutely sure it got someone's attention.

"I was there for you," Midoriya gasps out suddenly, and his voice shakes and breaks more than once. "I-Iida, I-I was there for you, I-I…I-I tried to be there for you, I-I…I *wanted* to be there for you, s-so…wh-why… *why did you push us away?"*

"I'm sorry," Tenya says immediately, because that's all he can think to say, and it feels dumb and insincere in this situation but he means it, oh how he means it. "I'm sorry, Midoriya. I-I…It's because of me that you were hurt, and—"

"T-That's not *it,"* Midoriya manages. "I'm *n-not mad* about *t-that.* I-I'd…I-I'd d-do it again, t-take a knife for you, or Todoroki, or Uraraka, or anyone. I-I'm mad t-that…t-that you were hurting like you were, a-and…y-you didn't say anything. You didn't say *anything."*

"I know, I know, I'm sorry—"

"D-Don't," Midoriya strains, and Tenya listens. "D-Don't…d-don't do it again. *Don't do it again."*

"I don't plan to," Tenya says numbly, and his eyes are burning, though he doesn't let it show. He wonders, briefly, where the nurses are and why they haven't come yet. "Midoriya, I—"

Midoriya slumps further into his arms and remains still.

A sense of horror and panic overwhelms every part of him. “Midoriya!?” There’s no response, no movement, no nothing. He wonders if Midoriya just ejected his spirit out of his body again, but no, that doesn’t seem right; Midoriya wouldn’t do that, now.

The door opens again, and the room fills with business as the doctors flood in. Midoriya is taken from him, although a part of Tenya doesn’t want to let go, and he really, *really* hates how limp Midoriya is as one of the nurses checks his breathing, as another two nurses wheel in a stretcher. Someone asks Tenya just what happened, and Tenya answers numbly, though his eyes stay on Midoriya’s limp form and he keeps the details to a minimum.

The crushing weight on his chest is still there. He doesn’t think it’ll ever go away. Despite that Midoriya doesn’t seem upset about the *literal knife* that’d been buried in his chest for Tenya’s sake, Tenya’s point of view is a bit different, on the matter.

He thinks of Midoriya’s words, really takes them to heart. He thinks of Midoriya’s blood, spilled for him. He thinks of that knife that should’ve been in *his heart,* of that knife that *would’ve* been in his heart if it hadn’t been for Midoriya.

Midoriya…

The doctors take Midoriya away, and for a moment, Tenya is back at the USJ, watching the doctors shunt Midoriya off on a stretcher to the waiting ambulances outside.

…I failed you. For the second time.

But…

The crushing weight won’t go away, but he accepts it. He accepts it and uses it as a foundation for his resolve, absentmindedly clenching his fists at his sides.

…I promise, Midoriya, I’ll won’t fail you again.

Chapter End Notes

> Movin' right along, here! \o/ I'll be posting a little guide chart re: the ex-holders of OFA which I hope will eliminate any confusion y'all might have, so that'll be coming soon, don't worry. :)

Until then, thank you for all your support!! I'm already knee-deep in chapter 23, so i'll try getting that to you guys soon, too!! :D Thanks for everything, y'all! Until next time, go beyond! PLUS ULTRA!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

From Now On

Chapter Summary

"From Now On" from The Greatest Showman

“From now on, these eyes will not be blinded by the lights.
From now on, what’s waited ‘till tomorrow starts tonight.
Let this promise in me start, like an anthem in my heart.
From now on. From now on.”

Chapter Notes

ART!!!

hybridfandomgirl

Another one by hybridfandomgirl

whitepanther0042

Thank you all so very much!!! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku...kind of sleeps. He thinks. He regains consciousness several times, and only for several seconds before he passes out again. He’s fairly certain he’s feverish; it’s rare that he wakes up with any sense of coherency, but when he does, he has time just to think, *oh man, I really screwed myself up this time,* before promptly dropping back into oblivion.

He thinks Mom visits once or twice, during these fits of consciousness and unconsciousness; he remembers Toshinori coming by once or twice as well, though he hasn’t seen any sign of his friends.

Or maybe they have visited and he’s just been unconscious or delirious during it. He can’t be sure.

Sometimes he wakes up and the room is dark; sometimes he wakes up and there’s sunshine, which is too bright and sends him spiraling back into unconsciousness with his head pounding mercilessly. He thinks he hears the ex-holders saying things to him, once or twice; calming words, worried questions, though he can’t make anything out and he isn’t sure he didn’t just imagine the whole thing.

He doesn't know for how long this goes for. Doesn't know how many days he spends snapping in and out of awareness.

It feels like it lasts an eternity.

It occurs to Izuku when he finally wakes up with some semblance of coherency, feeling like he'd just been run over by a semi-truck, accompanied by seven angry, worried voices in his head, that what he did the other day was very, very stupid.

"I-I know, I-I know, it was dumb," Izuku tells the ex-holders weakly when he wakes up to their furious voices in his head. "I-I shouldn't have g-gotten up, I-I should've stayed in bed—please stop yelling at me, I-I get it, j-just…"

They do calm down, thank goodness, but he can almost feel how angry they are with him, even though their voices aren't bounding through his skull anymore. His headache lessens some once they're gone, but doesn't leave entirely, and he takes in a breath through his nose and releases it through his mouth.

Howler is laying on top of his stomach, where he's been since Izuku first woke up; pinning him down, Izuku assumes. Whenever he shifts or even does something that even *hints* towards his getting up out of bed, Howler places a paw on his shoulder, a warning.

"How're you feeling?" Dai asks—definitely Dai's voice.

"P-Pretty wrecked," Izuku croaks. "A-And...I-I guess I've only got myself to blame, f-for that…"

He doesn't know why, but within his head, the ex-holders are silent for a good long while.

"...Before," Nana says quietly, *"when you first woke up, right before you went to see your friend...you were panicking. And...feeling things."*

She says "things," but Izuku knows exactly what she means. Dai's feelings. Dai's pain.

"...Did it happen again?"

Izuku swallows thickly. "...Yeah."

Silence.

Izuku swallows thickly. They never talked about it, much, Izuku seeing their deaths; usually they were a comfort after the fact, but they generally didn't bring him back to it.

Maybe this is the exception. Maybe that's a good thing.

But, with how he's feeling, maybe not *now*.

"…I-I…I-I want to talk to you all," Izuku says quietly, and his voice cracks for more reasons than one, "w-when…when I'm out of here. O-Or, even just…when I'm feeling a little more like myself."

The voice that comes next is familiar—Kibō, Dai's predecessor.

"It's okay, sweetheart, take your time. It…makes sense, why you'd want to talk about it. And…I think it's only fair to you that we do."

"Yeah, boyo, I agree with her there." Izuku has heard this voice quite often, but he hasn't yet been able to put a name to it. The villain—"All For One," by name—had mentioned someone named Yukō. Maybe this is him.

He also mentioned a brother…

A wave of pain crashes over him, through his head and through his chest, and he grits his teeth and curls his fingers around handfuls of the hospital sheets. The ex-holders go silent until the pain passes; Howler bumps Izuku's chin gently with his nose in concern, and Izuku moves one hand to pat the dog's head.

"I-I'm okay," he murmurs, scant of breath. "I-I'm okay, Howler…"

"Stop saying that," Nana says, lightly, but firmly. *"You're not okay right now, not okay at* all. *You need to rest."*

"She's right," Aki agrees immediately. *"You're thinking too much, man, you need to—"*

"Which one of you is All For One's brother?"

Silence. Again.

"…That would be me."

The voice is soft, hesitant; Izuku hasn't heard the voice that often, maybe once or twice, and usually the user just makes a passing comment about how "everyone is too loud" and how "it's too early for

this."

He sounds more reserved, now. Hesitant.

"...My name is Mirai. My brother...the strongest villain to ever walk the earth, that's what he is. But...you know this. I don't need to tell you."

He's right, he doesn't. Izuku knows all too well. He takes in a breath through his nose, holds it through a small wave of pain, then releases it.

"Mirai?" he repeats, committing the name to memory.

"Yeah. Mirai."

Izuku opens his mouth to ask something else—to inquire further about All For One, ask what his goals are, ask *who exactly he is* and what his connection with the holders of One For All are (because honestly, with such similar names, there *has* to be a connection), but he's stopped.

"Don't say anything else," Mirai says. *"This isn't something you should be thinking about right now, not when you're in the hospital like this. Wait, and...when the time comes...talk to your mentor. It's better this way, believe me."*

Izuku sinks his teeth into his bottom lip, but resigns quickly. Thinking about this is already making the pounding in his head go up, and there isn't much else he'd rather do than sleep right now.

Except, then, the door of his hospital room opens, and in walks the doctor. He'd seen the doctor more than anyone else, during his bouts of semi-consciousness; Izuku has no doubt that he has this doctor to thank for his life.

The doctor looks up at him, then smiles. "You're awake," he says, shutting the door behind him and crossing the room, clipboard tucked under one arm. "Your fever broke yesterday. It's good to see you up."

Izuku blinks at him groggily. "H-How…" His throat still feels like sandpaper, and he can't manage much more than a murmur. "How long was I out for?"

"Ahh, a few days," the doctor answers, shifting his clipboard so he's holding it in front of him. "Three, if you want me to be precise. I was expecting it to be more, but I'm glad I was wrong. You've got a lot of people worried about you, kid."

Izuku swallows to moisten his throat. He thinks about his friends, about Mom, about Toshinori. He doesn't want to imagine what he'd put them through…

"W-When…w-when can I see them?" Izuku manages, because in the back of his mind, he knows that the doctors aren't letting him accept visitors anymore, and with good reason.

"I'd like to give it a few more days," the doctor answers, lowering himself onto the stool by Izuku's bedside. "You've mostly healed, by now, but considering you had a major episode right after having visitors, well, we don't want that to happen again."

Izuku doesn't say that it wasn't his friends' fault, even though he knows the truth. Instead, he nods. A few days isn't long; he can cope with that, and he'll see his friends soon.

"However," the doctor says, and Izuku looks at him again, "if you're feeling up to it, say, tomorrow, you're free to walk around. We won't be discharging you for a little while longer, but staying cooped up in bed gets hard after a little while."

Izuku isn't sure what the doctor is hinting at—maybe it's the fact that he'd no doubtedly made his condition worse by getting up too soon to go see Iida.

Iida…

"I'd like to speak with you, for a bit," the doctor goes on, drawing Izuku's attention back to him, "if you feel up to it. Regarding your condition."

Izuku *isn't* feeling up to it, really, but he's curious, so he nods.

The doctor tells him what he already assumed—that his injury was grave but that the knife missed his organs and most of his major arteries, which was good. He says it'll take time before Izuku is back to his old self but that, with the doctor's healing Quirk and a visit from Recovery Girl in early stages (it must've been while Izuku was in that fitful delirium, because he doesn't remember that at all), he'll be able to head home within the next couple of days—granted, of course, there are no further complications.

"You were lucky, you know," the doctor says, flipping back the pages on his clipboard and looking at Izuku again. "Most people wouldn't have survived an injury like that."

Vaguely, Izuku remembers seeing something—a white, dream-like landscape, seven figures one way and one single figure the other. But it's vague, barely there, and he can't be sure whether it was *real* or, well, a dream.

Either way, he nods. "T-Thank you for everything," he manages, and he has half a mind to use some kind of medical pun, here, but holds himself back. He isn't sure the doctor would appreciate that.

The doctor smiles and pats his ankle. "Just doing my job, kid," he says, rising to his feet. "You breathing okay without the oxygen mask?"

Izuku nods.

"Then I'll leave it off, for now," the doctor says, "but be sure to call a nurse in if you start having trouble again."

"I-I will."

"You'd better," says Nana, and Izuku can't blame her.

"I'll let you rest, now," the doctor tells him, stepping towards the door. "Be sure to call a nurse if you think something might be wrong."

Izuku nods, croaks out a thank you, and the door shuts behind the doctor as he leaves. Izuku is alone, then, left to stare up at the ceiling and contemplate whether or not it's worth it to try sleeping again. He can't imagine he'll see another one of the ex-holders' deaths any time soon, but then again...he can't ever be sure.

(And the last thing he wants to do is have another fit and end up staying in the hospital for longer than he already is.)

He's relieved when his phone dings, just so he can have something else to think about; he reaches over, winces when the bandages around his chest shift against the wound, but ultimately grabs his phone and drags it back towards him. Howler looks at him, skeptical —or, as skeptical as a dog can look.

"Just for a second," Izuku says, patting the dog's head soothingly. "I just wanna see who it is, okay?"

It's odd, he thinks, just how much Howler comprehends; the dog immediately rests his head on Izuku's shoulder again, and Izuku moves his phone in front of his face, turns the brightness all the way

down, then reads the text.

[Iida]
I'm sorry for ignoring you before. That wasn't right. I didn't know what to say, but I shouldn't have ignored you.

[Izuku]
I forgive you.

[Iida]
Oh, you're awake?

[Izuku]
Nah. This is Howler.

[Iida]
…

[Izuku]
Just kidding, yeah it's me. Sorry.

[Iida]
It's alright.
The doctor came by earlier. I'm getting discharged tonight.

[Izuku]
\o/
You gonna come visit me finally or nah?
Or do I have to hunt you down myself?

[Iida]
Please don't. You'll wind up hurting yourself again.
I'm…I'm sorry, but, I need some time, Midoriya. To think. Before I visit you.

[Izuku]
Ahh, I see. That's alright.
I need to talk to you, though, and I want to do it in person.
So…once you get your thoughts together, I mean…
I really do need to talk to you. Without screaming at you in the middle of the night, preferably.

[Iida]
Yes, that would be prefered. You scared me the other night.

[Izuku]

Yeah I do that to a lot of people.

[Iida]
…
Anyway…once I've thought about it, once I've gathered myself a bit…I'll come talk to you. There's a lot that I want to say to you, too, and sending it over a text message doesn't seem appropriate.

[Izuku]
Yeah, my thoughts too.
Talk to you later, then. Congrats on getting discharged! ٩(ᐛ)۶

[Iida]
…Thank you. See you soon.

[Izuku]
Coolio, cya!

[IIDA IS OFFLINE]

Izuku sets his phone on the bedside table again and stares up at the ceiling for a little while longer. Dai's death is still fresh in his mind, but for now, he tries to stow it away; there'll be time for him to talk to Dai about it, later. There'll be time.

For now, though, he shuts his eyes and is asleep before he even realizes it.

He starts wearing his bell again the next day. He has to ask a nurse about it, first, who asks the doctor, but in the end they give him the okay, especially when he mentions, briefly, that it's a source of comfort.

For the most part, it's boring, sitting in the hospital. Mom is here often, but she has to work, too, so Izuku is alone at least half of the time. Toshinori visits, too, considering he was listed as Izuku's second emergency contact (Izuku can't help but wonder what the hospital thinks of the two of them—father, son, relatives, perhaps, the likes), and they play cards when Izuku is awake enough, but even that gets old reasonably quickly.

"I want to *do something,"* Izuku moans, putting his face in his hands after a game of Go-Fish, which Toshinori is *frustratingly good at.* "I don't wanna be cooped up here anymore. It's boring."

Toshinori shakes his head, stacking the cards into a single pile. “I know it’s bad, now,” he says, “but the doctors are discharging you soon enough. I’m surprised they aren’t keeping you for longer.”

Izuku exhales through his nose, taking up his cards when Toshinori deals them out again. “I-I guess,” he says, shaking away what tiredness nags at his mind. He plays a card, then lets out another sigh. “I miss seeing my friends, though. Do you know when I’ll be able to see them again?”

“I haven’t asked, no,” Toshinori says. “I could, if you’d like. Do you have any fives?”

Izuku passes a card over. “No, that’s okay. I’m sure they’ll visit as soon as they get the chance.”

“Ooh, ask for a seven, boyo, I have a good feeling about this one.”

“Do you have any sevens, Toshinori-san?”

“Nope. Go-Fish.”

“OH DAGNABBIT.”

“THAT’S THE THIRD TIME YOU’VE STEERED HIM WRONG!! STOP TELLIN’ HIM TO DO STUFF!!”

“Daaammmn, Daniel, back at it again with the hecking WRONG GO-FISH CARD.”

“SHUT UP, GERALD, IT’S NOT MY FAULT.”

“I’m AKI, stop calling me Gerald!”

“Hey, quiet down. Remember what Izuku said about his head?”

Thank God for Nana.

“Oh, yeah, right, sorry, we’ll be quiet now.”

Toshinori asks for a two, and Izuku passes it over. The voices of the ex-holders remind him of his conversation with Mirai, All For One’s brother, and Izuku has half a mind to ask Toshinori just who All For One is and what’s the connection between him and One For All, but…

“Do you have a three?”

“Go-Fish.”

As he draws a card, he decides he doesn’t want to. There’s a lot he wants to tell Toshinori, a lot he wants to ask, but he doesn’t want to disturb this tranquility.

Instead, he sighs again. “I counted how many knots there are in the ceiling,” he says. “Thirty seven.”

Toshinori exhales sharply through his nose and shakes his head. “Don’t worry, my boy, you’ll be out of here soon,” he says, shifting through the cards of his hand. “And, there’s a chance they’ll discharge you sooner…” Toshinori looks him in the eye and holds up a single card, “...if you play your *cards* right.”

Izuku *almost* throws a pillow at him, but decides not to at the last second. (Though he isn’t able to hold back when Toshinori makes a comment about “having to *hand* it to him.”)

He’s allowed to get up, the next day, and take a short walk down the hospital halls.

He takes Howler with him; the dog needs to stretch his legs just as much as Izuku does, and Izuku makes a mental note to take Howler to the park and play ball with him for a *long* time, once he’s recovered enough.

He also takes his phone with him, and his bell is snug around his neck. He’s glad to be able to wear it again, and he occasionally brushes his thumb against the cool metal, just a reminder that he’s still here and alive.

Walking is...it’s, well, it’s *nice,* because the last time he actually got up and walked on his own (aside from short trips across his hospital room to the restroom, but that hardly counted) was when he dragged himself down the hallway to get to Iida’s room a few nights prior, and that was...less than ideal. It’s nice to walk now; the stitches on his chest tug and the bandages shift against his skin, but it isn’t hard to ignore. He’s glad to be back on his feet again, even though he’s sure he’ll have to sit down and catch his breath as soon as he finds a bench. He was given a single crutch by a nurse before heading out, and even now he leans heavily against it as he walks.

The hospital is mostly empty. He passes a few other patients and doctors as he makes his way down the hall, with Howler trotting

happily at his side, looking around curiously and taking in his surroundings. Izuku is glad Howler is here; along with his bell, Howler is another great source of comfort to him.

Izuku makes his way to a small room tucked away in the back of the hospital—a sort of "hospitality" room, he assumes. There's a little vending machine (mostly stocked with juices and water bottles) and several benches, upon which Izuku takes a seat quickly. Howler sits obediently at his side, tail swishing the ground, and Izuku leans the back of his head against the wall and breathes.

He supposes it could be a lot worse, but *dang,* he'd be lying if he said this pain doesn't *suck.* Howler gives him a look, caught somewhere between concern and "I told you so," which is weird, but Izuku doesn't question it.

"I'd do it again, you know," Izuku says.

Howler lets out a distressed little whine and headbutts Izuku on the knee. Izuku smiles faintly and scratches him behind the ears.

After a second—when he thinks about it—he pulls his phone out of the pocket of his sweatpants and scrolls through it absentmindedly. Without having anything better to do, he finds himself in the group chat.

[Chatroom: "INSERT CLEVER TITLE HERE"]

[SPEARMINT is ONLINE]

[Spearmint]
\o/

[Thermostat]
Why.
You literally relapsed why.

[Spearmint]
¯_(ツ)_/¯

[The Rock]
YO!! BUDDY!! YOU'RE OKAY!!
We were really worried when the doc wouldn't let us see you sdhfkjdf. How're you holding up?

[Spearmint]

Fine now, thanks! Was able to get up and walk around for a while, too, which is nice. It's good to finally be out of bed!!

[Gravity Falls]
Aww, I'm so glad to hear you're doing better!! That's great!! <3 Oh, that reminds me, we talked to the doctor this morning, and he said that we'd be okay to visit tomorrow. I wanted to ask if you were okay with that?

[The Rock]
^^ Yeah, we wanted to ask this time since last time we visited you ended up having an episode shdkfjdf.

[Thermostat]
If you don't feel like company that's fine, just say so. We can wait.

[Spearmint]
Nonono, I'd love for you guys to visit!! Please do!! The episode wasn't brought on by you guys visiting, I promise you that.
Seeing you guys always lifts my spirit! :D

[Thermostat]
…

[Gravity Falls]
Nevermind what I said, he's fine.

[The Rock]
Pfffffttt.
Great to see you back to your usual self!

[Spearmint]
ᕙ(͡°)ᕗ

[The Rock]
ᕙ(͡°)ᕗ

[Thermostat]
Please don't encourage him.

[Gravity Falls]
ᕙ(͡°)ᕗ

[The Rock]

ﾍ(̄ω ̄)ﾉ

[Spearmint]
ﾍ(̄ω ̄)ﾉ

[Thermostat]
I'm sighing really hard right now.

[The Rock]
Seriously though, Midoriya, you cool with us visiting tomorrow?

[Spearmint]
ﾍ(̄ω ̄)ﾉ

[Gravity Falls]
Okie dokie, then! We'll see you tomorrow!

[Spearmint]
`*` ヽ(^o^)ノ
(ﾉ^_^)ﾉ*`*`*
\ (~o~) / *`*`*
↖(^▽^)↗

[Thermostat]
What

[Spearmint]
ﾍ(̄ω ̄)ﾉ
Cya tomorrow!!

[Gravity Falls]
See you!! <3

[The Rock]
See ya! ﾍ(̄ω ̄)ﾉ

[Spearmint]
\o/

[THERMOSTAT is OFFLINE]

[GRAVITY FALLS is OFFLINE]

[THE ROCK is OFFLINE]

Izuku tucks his phone back into his pocket and leans his head back against the wall again, shutting his eyes and taking in a deep breath.

He feels less winded now that he's taken a break, but to say he looks forward to the trip back to his room would be a lie, with or without his crutch.

He sighs. *Should probably go on and head back, then,* he thinks, setting his crutch against the ground and pushing himself to his feet. Howler is right beside him, ready to move.

Then he notices someone on the other side of the room, struggling to press a button on the vending machine from their wheelchair. Izuku immediately makes his way over, Howler hot on his heels.

"Ahh, do you need help?" Izuku asks once he's close enough; he notices the man in the wheelchair (young, black hair, maybe...mid-twenties) jump, but then, he lowers his hand with a sigh.

"Oh, thanks," he says, and Izuku nods wordlessly and moves his hand towards the button he'd been reaching for.

"This one, right?"

"Mm, yeah."

Izuku presses it. The man reaches down and pulls a can of green tea from the door below.

"Thanks for the help," he says, raising his head towards Izuku. "I appreciate it a lot."

"Don't mention it, I'm glad—"

Izuku finally meets the stranger's eyes and stops. Black hair, soft crimson eyes, an embarrassed smile…

Iida Tensei blinks at him. "...Midoriya Izuku."

Izuku blinks back. "...Ingenium."

"I, ahh, appreciate the sentiment," Tensei says, his can of tea between his hands; it's open, but he hasn't touched it, "but please, just call me Tensei. Any friend of my brother's is a friend of mine. Besides..."

His smile turns sad, and he looks down at his legs.

"...It's not like I'll be returning to hero work," he says.

Izuku winces, just a bit. Howler bumps his head against Tensei's leg, and Tensei jumps, but only for a second.

"Your dog seems pretty friendly," he comments lightly, raising his head to smile, more honestly this time.

"He is," Izuku agrees, nodding. He's sitting on a bench just beside Tensei's wheelchair, clutch leaning against the wall behind him. "His name is Howler."

"Howler, huh?" Tensei scratches Howler's ears, and Howler melts against his leg. "My family's never had a dog, but we're thinking about getting a service dog for myself, once all this is over."

Izuku smiles. "I can definitely vouch for them," he says, reaching over and patting Howler's head. There's silence, for a time, until Tensei breaks it.

"You know," he says idly, staring off at the other side of the room, "Tenya, my brother...he's told me a lot about you, Midoriya. I'm glad I finally got to meet you, although…" His smile is more of a wince than anything. "...It sucks that it had to be under these circumstances."

Izuku nods. "Iida's told me a lot about you, too. He looks up to you a lot, wants to be like you…" He can't help but feel a little inept, here, but he keeps talking. "I'm...I'm sorry, for what happened to you."

"Nah, don't say that." Tensei cuffs him lightly in the back of the head. "It's...hard, I won't lie, and I'm not entirely sure what'll happen when it actually, y'know, *clicks,* but…"

He smiles at Izuku again, more honestly this time. "I won't be alone. And, I know I have you to partially thank for that."

Izuku bites his lip. "...Yeah."

Tensei lets out a sigh. "There hasn't been much," he says, "but, I saw it on the news the other day, how a couple U.A. students had a run-in with the Hero Killer...you, my brother, and that Todoroki kid."

Izuku bites his lip harder.

"The police will probably try to cover for you," Tensei says, quieting down, "let some other hero take the credit for it, but...I think I know what happened. I know how Tenya can get, how single-track minded he can be...he was the one who found Stain, isn't he?"

Izuku doesn't lie. Tensei would see through it, anyway. "...Yeah."

"And you saved him. Took a knife for him."

Izuku nods again. "I don't remember actually, you know, moving," he admits. "I just, one moment I was suddenly *there,* and…I don't know. It...happened, and that was it."

"Either way, Midoriya...thank you."

Izuku raises his head and blinks. "What?"

"I said, thank you," Tensei says. "Tenya, he's...he's my little brother, y'know? And if Stain was trying to kill him...if you took a knife meant for Tenya, then...you *saved* him. And, inadvertently, saved me."

Izuku blinks at him again, then exhales sharply through his nose and looks down at his hands. "...You're welcome. I'm...I'm glad I was there. The knife didn't kill *me,* but...it would've killed Iida."

Because Stain was aiming for Iida's heart, and with precision like Stain's, he would've hit his target, no question.

Tensei nods. "...I'm definitely having a long talk with Tenya," he says. "I understand where he's coming from, but…" He clenches his hands tighter around the can. "...Going after a villain like that for *vengeance,* it's…"

"I punched him in the face."

Tensei whirls around to look at him, eyes wide.

"I was mad at him," Izuku says, "so I tracked him down and punched him in the face. And then I yelled at him for a solid minute."

"...Not gonna lie," Tensei says, shaking his head, "I have no idea how to respond to that."

"Yeah, Iida didn't, either. And I passed out before I had the chance to calm down and think about it, so…" His voice trails off, and he sighs. "I was, just, I was upset with him for doing what he did. I get he was angry, and hurt, and everything, but…"

"Hey, Midoriya, quick word of advice from Tenya's big brother."

"Please."

“Tell him this,” Tensei says. “Whatever you were about to tell me, along with the things you *have* told me…the next time you talk to him, just, say it. Tenya is one-track minded when it comes to the heat of the moment, but now that he’s had some time to cool down, he’ll listen to you.”

Izuku smiles faintly. “Speak from experience?”

Tensei groans. “Oh, you have *no idea* the types of arguments we got into,” he says, shaking his head. “We got along for the most part, but when we *didn’t* get along, well…Tenya is stubborn. Didn’t talk to me for a week.”

“Wow.”

“Yeah, but like I said, once he calmed down we were able to talk it out, the two of us. I think that’s what you need to do. Now that Tenya’s been brought back down from his high, it’ll be easy to talk to him, and he’ll listen, believe me.”

Izuku nods, taking this to heart. He remembers Iida telling him that he needed some time—maybe he’s aware that he needs time to cool down before talking to someone, too.

“Thanks, I appreciate it,” Izuku says, smiling at Tensei. “I’m an only child, so the whole…’sibling’ thing is kinda…foreign, y’know. Except…” Izuku pauses, pondering. “…Being friends with Iida is kind of like having an insufferable big brother, so—”

Tensei actually laughs at that, shaking his head. “Tell him that, too,” he says, “if just so you can see the look on his face afterwards.”

Izuku smiles, too. “I think I might, then,” he says, some of the weight in his chest easing. Tensei is an easy person to talk to. “Thanks for hearing me out and giving that advice, Tensei.”

Tensei is already shaking his head. “Nah, don’t thank me,” he says. “Thank *you* for being such a great friend. Tenya needs someone that isn’t afraid to tell him the truth, so I’m glad he has you.”

Izuku beams. “And I’m glad I have Iida as a friend, too,” he says; Howler is leaning against his leg again, and Izuku runs his fingers through the dog’s fur.

“Ahh, I’m sorry,” Tenesi says, shaking his head and turning back towards Izuku, “but, if you don’t mind me asking…how did you get

that scar?"

"Oh, this one?" Izuku traces it with one finger; it starts at his temple and cuts diagonally across his face. "I smacked my head into a desk when I was twelve. It's a long story, and I don't really have a whole lot of time, but…"

"A desk, huh?" Tensei tilts his head a little, curious. "Must've hit it at a weird angle for it to slice across your face like that."

Izuku blinks. "...Guess so," he says, tracing the scar again, thinking. The scar is always there, but it isn't something he actively thinks about. Sometimes he forgets he even has it.

"Well, anyway," Tensei says, looking up again, "I'll let you get back to your room. Best of luck to you and the rest of your recovery."

"Oh, you too," Izuku says immediately, grabbing his crutch and pushing himself to his feet. "I hope everything goes well for you, Tensei."

"Thanks!" Tensei gives him a thumbs up. "I *wheely* hope it does, too."

Izuku blinks.

Tensei grins.

"...Did...did Iida tell you that I absolutely love puns?"

"Wait, you do? What a *pun*intentional coincidence!"

"Ayyy!"

"Ayyy!"

Izuku sits down again, and he doesn't miss the hour he spends punning back and forth with Tensei. It's time well-spent in his book.

[Chatroom: "INSERT CLEVER TITLE HERE"]

[SPEARMINT is ONLINE]

[Spearmint]
\o/

[Thermostat]

What's that for?

] Spearmint]
I get to see y'all today!
\o/ \o/ \o/

[Gravity Falls]
Aww, Deku you're so cute!!

[Thermostat]
Are those supposed to be cheerleaders

[The Rock]
Cya soon, buddy!

[Spearmint]
Cya! *\o/*

Izuku stares up at the hospital ceiling, counting the knots again while he waits for his friends to get here (he counts thirty eight this time; he must've missed one the last time he counted, huh). Howler is tucked under his arm, curled into a ball, head resting on Izuku's stomach, and Izuku absentmindedly strokes the dog's fur.

There's a knock on the door, and Howler's head lifts and snaps in that direction immediately. He lets out a tentative, questioning *boof,* and Izuku smiles and pats his head.

"Yeah, come in," he calls across the room; the door opens a moment later, and in step Uraraka, Kirishima, and Todoroki, in that order.

"Deku!" Uraraka shrieks, practically throwing herself across the room, and although she looks desperately like she wants to hug him, she restrains herself, stopping at the edge of his bed. "I'm glad you're okay, we were really worried!"

"Seriously," Kirishima breathes, shaking his head. "I wouldn't be surprised if we all have gray hairs by the time we become heroes, being friends with you and all."

"You need to be more careful," Todoroki says, which is exactly what Izuku knows is true. He smiles, then nods at the three of them in turn.

"Thanks for coming," he says. "I'm, y'know, I'm sorry I…"

He stops, raising his head. There's someone else standing in the

doorway. Kirishima, Uraraka, and Todoroki all follow his gaze.

Iida looks more reserved and resigned than Izuku has ever seen him, not fully meeting Izuku's eyes. He was discharged yesterday, Izuku recalls, and instead of a hospital gown, he's wearing a plain collared shirt and jeans.

Without even realizing it, Izuku finds himself beaming. "It's good to see you again, Iida."

Tenya feels...out of place. Even though these are his friends, even though Kirishima and Midoriya are laughing at a dumb pun made by the latter, even though Uraraka is threatening to throw a pillow at the both of them, even though Todoroki is smiling, although it's soft and faint...Tenya doesn't feel like he should be here.

But he is. He finally managed to drag his thoughts together and go to Midoriya's hospital room. And now that he's here, he finds himself at a loss of words, finds himself in a serious state of *I don't belong here, I shouldn't be here,* and he sits in the background for the most part, speaking only when directly engaged in conversation (which isn't often). He gets a couple pointed looks from Todoroki and a few concerned ones from Midoriya, but that's about it.

Oh, and Howler has been giving him side-glances, too, though he doesn't leave Midoriya's side.

It's...nice, Tenya thinks, watching everyone laugh and jest. Being *able* to watch everyone laugh and jest, anyway. This situation here would be very different, if Midoriya hadn't survived...if that knife had been two inches to the left, two inches to the right, two inches higher, lower…

Stop.

He does, lifting his gaze and drawing his focus back to the conversation at hand. Midoriya looks...better. Still exhausted, but the rings underneath his eyes aren't as prominent as before, and most of the color has returned to his face, along with the light in his eyes.

"...Lighten up a little, Iida!"

It's at that moment that Kirishima's hand meets his back between his shoulder blades, sending him forward and almost out of his chair, though he catches himself in time.

“Just, loosen up!” Kirishima says again, grinning at him. “Everything’s gonna be alright now, don’tcha know?”

Todoroki, Uraraka, and Midoriya also look at him, concerned, and Tenya straightens his glasses and shakes his head.

“I apologize,” he says. “I will try to…’lighten up’ from here on.”

They don’t seem convinced, but that’s alright. Actually, Midoriya reaches over and needlessly turns on the bedside lamp.

“Maybe this’ll lighten things up,” he says.

Uraraka flips the corner of his blanket over his head while both he and Kirishima howl with laughter. Todoroki rolls his eyes, but doesn’t seem as frustrated as he normally would, and Tenya can’t bring himself to be, either. Leave it to Midoriya to disperse the tension.

“Ahh, that kind of reminds me,” Midoriya says, pulling the blanket down from his face. His hair is messier than usual (something Tenya hadn’t thought was possible), and his eyes find Tenya’s. “Iida, is it okay if I talk to you for a minute, just...privately?”

Oh.

Oh *dear*.

Kirishima is already on his feet, nodding. “We’ll wait outside!” he says, waving a hand; beside him, Uraraka and Todoroki also get to their feet and follow him toward the door. “See ya ‘round!”

“Bye, Deku!” Uraraka says, waving at him—and then she, Todoroki and Kirishima leave the room and shut the door behind them, so only Midoriya and Tenya (and Howler, too, of course) remain.

It was one thing when everyone was here laughing and joking around, but now that Tenya is alone with Midoriya, the weight in his chest returns full-throttle. He bites his lip, subconsciously balling his fists against his legs; and then, he scoots his chair just a little bit closer, until his knees nearly touch the edge of the bed.

“Midori—”

“Iida—”

They stop, staring at each other.

“You first,” Midoriya says.

Tenya shakes his head. “No, you go first.”

Midoriya takes in a breath, then lets it go. “...I’m...sorry I punched you,” he says, clenching his fists. “Even though I was mad, I shouldn’t have done that. That was wrong. I’m sorry.”

Tenya shakes his head again. “No, don’t apologize,” he says, “you had every right to be angry with me, every right to punch me. I’m sure if our situations were reversed, I would have done the same thing.”

Midoriya exhales sharply through his nose, nodding shakily. “...When you went after the Hero Killer like you did, I-I...I mean, I was angry afterwards, but...what I really was was *scared.”* His voice cracks at the end, and there’s a sudden lump in Tenya’s throat. “And...sometimes it...it still scares me. When I got to the alley, and Stain was there, and you were on the ground like that, for a second…”

His balled fists shake.

“...I thought I *was* too late.”

Tenya’s breath catches in his throat.

“And I know you were hurting,” Midoriya says, and his voice is steady despite his trembling hands. “I *know* you were hurting, I know you were angry, and I know you thought you were doing the right thing, going after Stain like you did, but...but, *Iida,* you can’t just—I thought—”

“You’re right,” Tenya says, swallowing hard. “...Going after Stain as I did...in that fit of blind rage, it was...it was rash. It was wrong, and I knew it.”

“I’m *sorry,”* Midoriya says, shoulders hunched. “I’m sorry I didn’t do more, Iida, but I—I tried, Iida, I *tried.* I tried being there, I tried reaching out, I—I just, I wanted—I wanted to *be there,* and—I thought I *was.”*

“You were,” Tenya says, and it’s easier to talk around the lump in his throat now, even though his eyes are burning, so he doesn’t stop. “You were there for me. You did everything in your power, reached out any way you could. I-I was, just…I-I was...”

An image of Midoriya’s bloody body flashes in his mind’s eye,

bloodstained knife right through him—and then he thinks of Kirishima giving Midoriya his bell, of Midoriya's nervous laughs and embarrassed smiles, the way he rubbed the back of his neck when he didn't know what else to do—he remembers the USJ, remembers Midoriya clearing the way for him to run, remembers leaving him behind—he remembers Midoriya appointing him as the class rep, trusting him, befriending him…

"I was so *blind,"* Tenya strains, throat tight, eyes burning. "You were there for me, but I couldn't see it past my own rage. Even though you did everything you could, reached out however you knew…I was stubborn. I knew you were right, but I didn't listen, because I thought I was right, too. I wanted to kill him. I wanted to make Stain pay for what he did."

Midoriya is looking at him. There are tears on his face. "Iida—"

"—I shunned you," Tenya cuts in, because if he doesn't say this now he'll never say it. "I pushed you away, and…and I hurt you, not just… *emotionally,* but…physically, too. I set out to hurt Stain, to make him pay, but in the end…the ones who really suffered…were the people I care about the most."

Midoriya says nothing, so Tenya goes on.

"I'm sorry," Tenya says. "I hurt you, I hurt you *gravely,* and—and if you said you hated me, if you never forgave me, if you never trusted me again, I wouldn't be able to think less of you. I'd deserve it, Midoriya, I'd—"

There are arms around his shoulders suddenly, and even though Tenya hadn't been expecting it he returns the gesture wholeheartedly, though he's mindful not to hold too tightly should Midoriya still be in pain.

"I-I don't hate you," Midoriya stammers, face muffled by Tenya's shoulder and voice thick with tears. "I don't hate you, I-Iida, I-I couldn't…I can be pissed at you but I c-couldn't *hate* you, I-Iida, s-so d-don't…please don't…"

Tenya squeezes his shoulders. "I'm sorry, Midoriya." He's crying now, too, for a lot of things. Loss, pain, release, *hurt,* hurting the people he loves— "I'm sorry, I'm so, so very sorry, for everything. I'm sorry, Midoriya, I'm *sorry…"*

"I-I forgive you. B-But don't do it again."

The weight leaves Tenya's chest, lifts completely, and he hugs his friend just a little bit tighter. "I won't," he says, and he means it. "I won't, Midoriya, I won't. I promise. I'm sorry."

I could have lost him.

"I-I'm sorry."

That fight could've cost him his life.

"I-I'm sorry."

And it's my fault.

"I-I said I forgive you," Midoriya says breathlessly, and there's some mirth in his voice now, though his arms don't loosen around Tenya's shoulders, and vice versa. "Y-You can stop apologizing now. A-As long as you don't do it again, I-Iida...as long as you *never* do that again…"

"I won't."

From now on…

...I'll do whatever it takes…

...To become the hero that the people I love can be proud of.

...To become the hero...that I *can be proud of.*

Chapter End Notes

Ayy!! Another update!! :D ((And hopefully archive isn't broken rn shdfksdf because the last time I updated this story archive broke like right afterwards rip))

But, anyway, there'll be one more "recovery" chapter before we get back into things! I'm looking forward to these upcoming happenings, and I hope y'all like what I've come up with! :D

Anyway, I wanna say thank you all SO MUCH for all your reviews last chapter. They put huge smiles on my faces and I've been having a rough go of it for the past while, so thank you all so much!! Your support makes all of this worth it! :D

Wellp, that's all from me for now! Until next time, go beyond! PLUS ULTRA!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Tightrope

Chapter Summary

"Tightrope" from The Greatest Showman

“Hand in my hand and we promised to never let go,
We’re walking a tightrope.
High in the sky, we can see the whole world down below.
We’re walking a tightrope.”

Chapter Notes

ART!!! :D :D :D

smoldekudeku

raven-dreaming (Warning: Blood)

THANK YOU BOTH SM!! :D Enjoy the chapter!! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku is discharged a few days later. His friends aren’t there for it; it’s late in the afternoon on a Friday evening, and his friends promised they’d visit him once he was back home and feeling a little better, which is fine. They’d been planning a day to just get together and hang out ever since the Spots Festival.

With luck, Izuku would be returning to school on Monday; he was in the hospital for a little over two weeks, which, although his days in the hospital had dragged by endlessly, seems like such a short time. Not that he’s complaining; the thought of going home, of returning to school, of getting back into a normal schedule, thrills him.

Mom drives him home, and for the most part, he sleeps, head resting against the cool glass of the passenger window. Usually Howler sits in the backseat on car rides, but this time, Howler is at Izuku’s feet, sitting, head in Izuku’s lap. Izuku dozes for the most part, waking up briefly when Mom orders takeout at a restaurant and some prescriptions from the pharmacy, but then he drops off again, and he stays that way until they’re home.

After that, he barely makes it inside and to the couch before face-planting and falling asleep, and even then, his mother has to wake

him up shortly thereafter so he can take his medications.

He wakes up with pressure on his back.

He turns his head and blinks the sleep out of his eyes; Howler is laying on top of him, which he seems to do quite often once he's deemed Izuku has moved around enough for the day and now has to sleep. Izuku twists his arm around and pats the dog's back. Howler tilts his head at his hand for a moment, then rests his head between Izuku's shoulderblades, uninterested.

"Pfft, be that way," Izuku says, trying to shift into a more comfortable position. The pain meds are still in effect, so Howler's weight isn't painful. Actually, it's comforting enough to be worth his trouble breathing. "After I can move around again, though, we're going to the park to play frisbee or something."

He doesn't see it, but he hears Howler's metal name tags jingle when his head snaps up, and feels Howler's fluffy tail swish against his calves.

It's evening now; Mom brings Izuku a plate of takeout when she realizes he's awake (and when Howler finally gets off him, which takes a lot of coaxing), and although she apologizes profusely for not making him something from home, he smiles and thanks her.

"It's fine," he says, smiling to abate her worries. "Believe me, it's more than fine." And it is; he only hopes Mom realizes this.

She does, and she smiles and bends down, kissing his hairline. She leaves Izuku to his food after that, and Izuku takes up his chopsticks and digs in. Howler has stopped sulking and is now staring at him from the other side of the couch, longingly.

Izuku points his chopsticks at him. "Don't look at me like that. You have your food, go eat that."

Except, he *does* give Howler a decent chunk of cutlet; he still feels bad about leaving the dog behind before tracking down Stain, what seems so very long ago.

After Izuku eats, he says goodnight to Mom, then goes with Howler to his room down the hall. He doesn't bother turning on the light, rather shutting the door and leaning against it, relishing in the darkness for a little while. When he opens his eyes, he realizes he isn't in *complete*

darkness—he then reckons he has his glowing eyes to thank for that.

“Hey, you guys okay?” Izuku asks quietly. “You haven’t said much all day, is something wrong?”

“Oh—sorry, we were trying to give you some space.”

“Yeah, we weren’t givin’ ya the cold shoulder or anything like that, boyo. Just thought you might like to have a peaceful evening without us screaming at you.”

“Oh,” Izuku says, blinking. “Thanks for the thought, but…I’m okay. Actually…”

“Oh boy.”

“…Dai.”

“Yeah, what up?”

“Can…can we talk, for a minute?”

“Um, sure thing, what is it?”

“No, I mean—can I summon you.”

He knows he could just summon Dai anyway, whether he willed it or not, but that seems…dehumanizing, and he doesn’t want to do that. Dead or not dead, Izuku won’t force Dai to talk if he doesn’t want to. So he asks. And then he waits through the silence, until,

“…Buddy, I really don’t think—”

“Please. Just for a minute.”

“…If you lay down first. And don’t keep me summoned for more than three minutes.”

“I’ll count,” Aki offers immediately. *“Just to make sure.”*

“Deal,” Izuku says, and when he starts toward his bed, he *swears* Howler gives him this “are you serious” kind of look, which really shouldn’t be a thing that’s possible.

Howler stays with his body on the bed, which he’s been trained to do, and Izuku—spirit Izuku—faces Dai.

Dai turns the other way, his blue aura casting a soft, mellow kind of light in stark contrast to Izuku's brightness. There are scars all over Dai's forearms, legs, and the back of his neck; scars Izuku hadn't noticed before, in the heat of the moment when they were fighting Stain.

"...You saw my death," Dai says, and it's not a question, merely an observation. "Those things you felt when you woke up...I know my own feelings anywhere."

Izuku swallows thickly. "Dai—"

"No, don't say anything, I'm sorry," Dai says, half-turning towards him with a sad kind of smile on his face, and Izuku knows the smile. It's a smile that has something to hide. A smile hiding a deeper pain and hurt. "I mean, hell, I don't even know what to *say* to this. You saw my *death,* and believe me, I *know* how gruesome it was."

Izuku swallows again. "...Dai…"

Dai laughs shakily, clapping a hand to his forehead. "I wasn't ready," he says, shaking his head feverishly. Izuku thinks he sees something sliding down Dai's face, something reminiscent of tears. "I didn't stand a frickin' *chance* against All For One, and I knew I didn't. *He* knew I didn't."

Izuku's throat is quickly closing up, constricting him. He wonders how long Dai has wanted to talk about this, wonders how long he *hasn't been able* to talk about this.

"There was so much more I wanted to do," Dai says, shaking his head. "So much more I wanted to *be,* except...damn it, *damn it all,* I wasn't enough. I never even got the chance to become a *hero—"*

"You saved them," Izuku blurts. "You *were* enough, Dai, you were...you were more than enough. You can't tell me you weren't, Dai, I *saw.* I saw you run at him, I *felt* how scared you were. You didn't want to, but you did. And...I-I can't think of anything more *hero-like* than that."

Dai lets out a shaky breath, then shakes his head. "When I was dead," he says, finally turning towards Izuku with some semblance of calm, "I thought, y'know...I thought it was over. I thought I'd be able to pass on, thought I'd be able to move forward in peace, but...I haven't. None of us have, not me, not the people before me, and not the people after me. All of us, we're...we're broken spirits, Midoriya."

For the briefest of moments, Izuku's mind flashes back to the Sports Festival, when he'd seen Todoroki's spirit during their fight. A flicker, a single moment, and it hasn't happened again since then, but it's been a nagging thing in the back of Izuku's mind for a long time now.

Regardless, he turns his attention back to Dai.

"We can't find peace the way we are," Dai says, gaze cast downward, "and...and I don't think we ever will."

"You will."

The words are out before Izuku realizes what he's saying.

"...All For One," Izuku says, and the name sounds so foreign on his tongue, but also oh so familiar. "The villain who killed you. The villain who killed your predecessor, who killed Aki, who killed Nana, who won't stop until he's killed us all...until he gets what he wants...he *will* be stopped. No matter what happens...I promise you, Dai. He'll be stopped, and...and you and the others will be able to rest in peace."

Dai lets out a sigh, running a hand through his hair. Izuku doesn't know what color it is, considering his entire form is outlined in blue.

"Thanks, Midoriya," he says, shaking his head. "I-I'm sorry for dumping that on you, I-I just...I never—"

A second spirit appears right before Dai, in between him and Izuku. Dai takes a step back in shock; Kibō stares down at herself, eyes wide, then looks at Izuku with a sense of shock.

Izuku does nothing—he isn't sure what kind of backlash summoning two ghosts in full-form at once will have on him, but right now, he's willing to take the risk.

"Kibō-sensei," Dai says, stepping back. It occurs to Izuku that this is the first time he's actually seen her since his death, and the thoughts strikes his heart like an icy dagger. "I-I—"

Kibō hugs him immediately, cutting Dai off mid-sentence, and Dai hugs her back with equal ferocity, shutting his eyes. Izuku smiles faintly, but turns away and lets them have their moment.

Dai, murdered.

Kibō, his mentor, who watched it happen.

They need this moment, and he's glad they're able to have it.

"Hey, um, Izuku," comes Aki's voice, *"I hate to be the one to say this, but three minutes are up, and you're still recovering. You don't wanna do too much too soon."*

Izuku bites his lip, because he really, *really* doesn't want to ruin this moment; but it turns out, he doesn't need to, because Dai eventually pulls away, as does Kibō, and they both smile at him.

"Thank you," Kibō says, and Dai nods his own agreement.

Izuku smiles, nods, and then lets go.

But not before Kibō's and Dai's arms snake around him in a quick but meaningful embrace.

...Aaaand then he's ducking into the bathroom to throw up. He makes a mental note to apologize to his mom in the morning as he shuffles back onto his room and faceplants the bed, while the ex-holders (though Dai and Kibō specifically) apologize and tell him he shouldn't have pushed himself.

Howler hops onto his back again and lays there, and Izuku lets out a huge sigh, already feeling his temperature spiking. Another fever, he guesses—he really does have to keep in mind Dissociate's side-effects on his body, especially when One For All is involved.

He grabs his phone off the side table, still feeling nauseous, and manages to open the group chat, even with the side of his face smushed in the pillows.

[Chatroom: "INSERT CLEVER TITLE HERE"]

[SPEARMINT is ONLINE]

[Spearmint]
hey remember that time we were talking about getting together sometime?
when the sports festival hype wore down?
do you guys want to come over tomorrow?

[Thermostat]
Tomorrow? Right after you got out of the hospital?

[Spearmint]
uh-huh. you guys busy?

[Speedy Gonzales]
Not that I know of.
Alright
Who changed my name.

[Gravity Falls]
Spearmint.

[The Rock]
Spearmint.

[Thermostat]
Spearmint.

[Spearmint]
Howler.

[Speedy Gonzales]
I'll let you have it this time, Midoriya.
As for whether or not I'm doing anything tomorrow, the answer is no.

[Gravity Falls]
Yeah, same here. I have to pick up some stuff from my internship, but I'll be done with that by, say, noon?

That reminds him; he still has to go get his things from Gran Torino's place. He makes a mental note to do that before heading back to school on Monday.

[Thermostat]
I'm busy Saturday morning, but if we got together in the afternoon it would work better for me.

[The Rock]
Schedule what schedule I'm free all the time.
Sounds like meeting in the evening would work better for the rest of us, tho. Does that work?

[Spearmint]
Probably. I still have to talk to my mom about it and make sure she's cool with it, but yeah, if you guys could meet at my house arounnddd…maybeeee…5pm? Does that sound good?

[Thermostat]
Works for me.

[Gravity Falls]
^^^

[The Rock]
^^^

[Speedy Gonzales]
Yes.

[Spearmint]
\o/
Awesome sauce!! :D Cya then!

He ditches the group chat before they can make any comments regarding his parting message.

Izuku wishes he could summon the ex-holders without feeling like he's going to puke his guts up—it'd be easier to talk to them in person, rather than just hear their voices in his head all the time.

He assumes he'll get better at it, that once he further harnesses One For All and completely makes it his own that he'll be able to. But for now, until then…

"So," Izuku says the next day, sorting through his closet and looking for something to wear, "it just occurred to me yesterday that I don't know all of your names."

"Oh yeah, that's right, we never mentioned that, did we?"

"I'm sorry for not asking sooner," Izuku says, grabbing a plain t-shirt out of his closet before deciding on it. "I just, I don't know, I never gave it much thought...everything happened too quickly, and now…"

"Nah, don't worry about it, kiddo. Well, you already know who I am—I don't think you've officially met my mentor, though—"

"HELL YEAH, THAT'S ME!"

"Okay, *wow,"* Izuku reels, blinking feverishly. "Almost jumped out of my skin there. *That* hasn't happened in a while…"

"Whoops, sorry!" She sounds energetic; if Izuku had to put a finger on

her personality, he'd call her some kind of over-enthusiastic soccer mom. *"Anyway, name's Senshi! I'm so damn proud of Nana and honestly, I'm proud of you too but you could really stand to TAKE BETTER CARE OF YOURSELF, DAMMIT."*

"Okay, *WOW!"* Izuku says again—she's definitely the *loudest* of the ex-holders, that's for sure. After regaining himself, he clarifies; "So, Senshi, you said?"

"Yep! And, my predecessor..."

"What's up, it's me, ya boy," says Aki, with a tone Izuku can't quite put his finger on. *"But I mean, you already knew that, so I won't waste any more time with pointless introductions. Dai, you have the stage."*

"I literally just had a whole conversation with him yesterday, he knows who I am."

"Oh. Rip."

"But, yeah, I'm Dai."

"And I'm Kibō, but again, you've already met me. And bless your heart, sweetie, but Senshi is right, you need to take better care of yourself."

"HELL YEAH YOU DO."

"Guess it's high time I introduce myself, now. Name's Yukō, and when I *was a boy—"*

"We know, we know, grandpa."

"How dare—"

"And I'm Mirai," cuts in the last holder before it can go on any longer. *"But we spoke yesterday, so you know who I am."*

Izuku nods—the name "All For One" comes to mind again, but he says nothing regarding him. Now isn't the time. Besides, Mirai already told him to ask Toshinori-san, not him, and Izuku intends to do just that.

"So," Izuku says, grabbing a pair of jeans along with the blue t-shirt, "your names are...Nana, Senshi, Aki, Dai, Kibō, Yukō, and Mirai?"

"Damn, nice, boyo. I can barely remember your *name sometimes."*

"Thanks, I feel loved."

“I’m kidding, I’m kidding—wait, who are you again?”

“Please don’t tease him, there’s no need for that right now.”

“Ack, you’re right, you’re right, sorry.”

Izuku doesn’t know why, but…since summoning Dai and Kibō last night, watching them embrace…it leaves something in his heart. He wants to get to know these people better, wants to hear more about their lives, how they met their successors, because there are untold stories here that no one outside the circle of One For All ever has a chance of knowing.

So he makes a mental note to do this—just as soon as he’s sure his body can take the strain (which, right now, still a bit feverish, he knows it *can’t).*

He *wants* to shower, but doesn’t; there are still stitches across his chest that he doesn’t dare disturb, even though the doctor is only leaving them in as a precaution and he’ll be getting them off tomorrow. For now, he washes his hair at the sink and tries to look presentable for when his friends come over later.

“Awww, you look great.”

Izuku exhales sharply through his nose. “You’re just saying that to make me feel better.”

“No, I mean it, sweetheart.”

“Yeah, buddy, for someone who was literally stabbed in the chest—”

“OY.”

Well. At least they’re talking again. Their silence is harder to deal with than their rambunctiousness.

Izuku dresses quickly (ignoring the black stitches across his chest, a little ways from where his heart would be—he knows it’ll scar), and for a second, he also notices another scar; on his shoulder, spread out like a small, jagged sun.

Oh, he thinks, pulling his shirt over his head. *I forgot Todoroki nearly impaled me on a piece of ice…although, I probably deserved it.*

He wonders if Todoroki remembers that.

He *tries* brushing his hair, and the keyword here is *tries;* his hair has always had a mind of its own, and now is no different, even though he's still towel-drying it and it's mostly damp.

"Dang, your hair just doesn't wanna stay put, does it?"

"I mean, it's always been like this," Izuku says, shaking his head and running his fingers through his still-wet hair. "It's nothing new…"

He pauses and frowns, squinting at himself in the mirror. He threads his fingers through his hair again, stopping at the tips and leaning forward towards the mirror.

"Hey, kiddo, what's up?"

"Nothing, just…" Izuku frowns at his reflection. "…I *think* I got something in my hair."

"What?"

"Yeah," Izuku says. "The roots look kind of white, here."

"…Huh. Well, whaddaya know. When I *was a boy,* I *didn't have white hair."*

"Maybe it's some kind of side effect of your Quirk?"

"Yeah, it could be that. I mean, your eyes literally glow so I'm not putting anything past your Quirk here."

"Thanks, that's nice." He sighs to himself and shakes his head. "Why do I have to be the one with the confusing Quirk…"

"Could be worse."

"I literally have seven ghosts living in my head."

"…Okay fair."

Izuku sighs, but eventually lets it go, drying his hair further, then leaving his room with Howler hot on his heels. Mom is making breakfast, by the smell of it; or maybe it's lunch. He doesn't know for how long he slept, and he hasn't checked a clock yet, so he wouldn't know.

The answer is 12:37pm, so lunch—it's a Saturday, so Mom doesn't

have work, and she makes katsudon, which tastes *so incredibly amazing* after spending over two weeks in the hospital.

“Oh, Mom, I wanted to ask,” Izuku says, setting down his chopsticks beside his bowl; she raises her head to meet his eyes. “I wanted to have a couple friends from U.A. over a little later on around five. Is that okay?”

It doesn’t take much considering before she answers. “That’s fine,” Mom says, “as long as you think you’re ready for more company.”

Izuku nods, thanks her, then digs back into his food. Once he’s finished eating, his mother declines his offer to help clean up, and after double-checking with her to make sure it’s alright, Izuku grabs Howler’s tennis ball from his room, then takes him outside.

The ex-holders are easy to talk to; for the most part, they’re a pretty chipper group of people, but…the more Izuku stops to think about it…the more he sees their deaths, the more he learns about them and their lives and their hopes and dreams…

Ugh. He feels so all over the place today. Maybe it’s his exhausted brain; maybe it’s the medications he’s on; he doesn’t know. Either way, a walk and some sunshine would be nice, plus, it’s been a while since he’s taken Howler to the park to play. Not to mention something else he hasn’t done in a while.

Shouto is exhausted, and every step he takes sends a dull ache through his bones. Father has been…less than thrilled with him the past couple of weeks, and this disappointment bleeds into their daily training sessions. Shouto considers himself lucky; his father got called out on a last-minute business call earlier this afternoon, which is the only reason Shouto was able to leave the house earlier, rather than endure a harsh training session before heading to Midoriya’s house.

Walks are nice. The air is cool, but the sun is shining. It’s refreshing, being able to take a break from the daily sparring sessions and just, walk instead. And he has hanging out with Midoriya and the others to look forward to in a couple hours, so there’s that as well.

He continues down the sidewalk, a little ways away from a nearby park. He has some time to kill before heading to the Midoriyas, but that’s fine; maybe he could stop by a corner store farther down the way, get a can of tea or something, then find somewhere to sit. The idea appeals to him; he’ll be alone, but at least he won’t be with his

father—

A ball lands near him in the grassy field to his left, and startled, he turns. The ball bounces a few times, then comes to a stop, remaining still.

Shouto blinks.

A second later, Howler leaps out of the bushes, running full speed towards the ball. He snatches it up in his teeth triumphantly, looking positively ecstatic.

And then he looks at Shouto. His head tilts to one side, and Shouto blinks again, not entirely sure what to think. Honestly? He has no idea what to think of Howler at *all*.

Howler spins around and starts back towards the direction from whence he'd come, and for a second, Shouto considers just shrugging it off and continuing on his way—but then, Howler looks at him over his shoulder, almost pointedly. The dog takes two more steps, then does the same thing again.

Shouto steps off the sidewalk into the grass and follows him.

Howler gets down on his front paws for a moment, tennis ball still between his teeth, and then he turns and bolts in the other direction. Shouto redoubles his pace, first to a jog and then to a run, when he realizes Howler isn't waiting for him anymore.

It seems stupid, almost, chasing a dog like this for no reason, but Shouto does it anyway. He'd wanted to kill time, anyway; maybe this is a good way to.

Howler leaps over a considerable bunch of bushes, and Shouto does the same, still following. This goes on for some time; Howler gives bushes, planters, and weeds little to no regard, and Shouto chases him.

And then Howler bursts into a clearing with Shouto hot on his tail. Shouto stops to catch his breath for a moment, then raises his head; Howler races up to Midoriya, tail wagging fervently, and Midoriya laughs, prying the ball from the dog's teeth with some difficulty.

"Sorry, boy," he says, "I won't throw it that far again."

Howler doesn't seem to give it much mind; instead, he looks behind

him and barks at Shouto twice, drawing Midoriya's attention to him. Midoriya raises his head and meets Shouto's eyes, blinking twice in confusion.

"Thermostat?" he says, almost disbelieving. He looks down at Howler, then back at him. "...Did Howler drag you here or…?"

"He was acting like he wanted me to follow him," Shouto answers simply, stepping towards Midoriya and his dog, "so I did."

Midoriya sighs. "Howler, you goof…"

Howler doesn't care whatsoever, and after a second, Midoriya retracts his ball-arm, and golden tendrils spread through his skin for just a moment before he hurls the ball into the sky at an angle.

Howler takes off immediately, running full-speed with his nose pointed upwards to the sky. Shouto watches until the dog disappears into the bushes, then turns back towards Midoriya.

"You're up?"

"Yeah," Midoriya says, nodding. "Just a walk, nothing strenuous, y'know."

"You were using your Quirk."

"Yeah, that's not strenuous. I haven't been able to take Howler out to play for a while, so I thought I'd make it up to him now."

Makes sense—Midoriya was in the hospital for a little over two weeks, and during those two weeks, Howler rarely left Midoriya's side. Shouto imagines the dog has a lot of pent-up energy, and these long ball throws from Midoriya are exactly the thing.

"So," Midoriya says, turning to him, "what brings you all the way out here?"

"I had some time to kill, so I thought I might as well take a walk," Shouto answers simply—Midoriya is an easy person to talk to, and it's odd, the lack of pressure he feels when talking to him. "I didn't think I'd bump into you and Howler, though."

"I think Howler likes you a lot," Midoriya says absentmindedly. "I mean, he likes most everybody, but he warmed up to you really quick."

“From what I’ve seen, Howler warms up to people pretty quick, in general.”

“Yeah, but still.” Midoriya sighs. “Anyway, once Howler gets back, there’s one more thing I have to do, but you can go ahead over to my house, even though it’s still early. You got my text, right? About the address?”

“Yeah, I did,” Shouto answers—he has it memorized, actually, but he doesn’t say this. “What else do you need to do?”

“Oh, just, um…” Midoriya shifts his weight, rubbing the back of his neck—a nervous habit, Shouto’s realized. “Y’know, just—”

Howler returns at that moment, poking his head out of the bushes with the ball between his teeth. He races over at once, and Midoriya laughs softly and picks leaves out of the dog’s fur.

“You can hold onto the ball for now, Howler,” Midoriya says, and the dog clenches his teeth around the tennis ball harder, tail swishing faster. “That’s all for today, boy.”

“Would you mind if I went with you?” Shouto asks unexpectedly—it surprises him, too, actually. “This thing you have to do...if you want to go alone, I understand that, but if it’s alright…”

Midoriya bites his lip, scuffs a foot through the grass. “I mean, it’s nothing...*bad,* and...I mean, I guess...it might be nice not to be alone, for once, so…”

“Are you sure?” Shouto says again. “If you want to go by yourself, that’s fine, too.”

“Nah, it’s fine,” Midoriya says lightly—and it seems fake, this sudden enthusiasm, but he smiles. “It’s a long walk from here, though.”

“That’s fine,” Shouto says. “We’ve got time before five, anyway, right?”

Midoriya pulls his phone out of his pocket and checks it. “Yeah, we’ve got about two hours,” he says, stuffing the device back into his pocket. “Well...let’s go, then.”

He starts walking. Shouto flanks him, and Howler does the same on the opposite side, the ball still in his mouth.

It's peaceful, all things considered. Shouto glances at Midoriya occasionally, just to make sure he isn't about to keel over, but he's fine, which relieves him immensely. He doesn't think he'll ever get that image of his head; the image of Midoriya, crashing to the ground with a knife in his chest, blood staining the ground beneath him…

"So, how are things?" Midoriya asks idly; he seems a bit…off-put, if that makes sense. Uncomfortable. Trying to break the silence with small talk.

"Things are normal," Shouto answers shortly. "Nothing new to talk about. You?"

"Not much," Midoriya says, "just…resting more than anything else."

Shouto nods. "Makes sense."

"The pain meds suck," Midoriya comments. "I think I'm partially immune to them, but I guess that's just what comes with taking them so often…"

He trails off, and Shouto doesn't push for the conversation to continue. They keep down the sidewalk, and the walk is not a short one.

"Oh," Shouto says, blinking. "…It's been a long time since I've been here…"

"Yeah," Midoriya says, overlooking the shoreline of Dagobah beach. The sun is beginning to set, sending sparkles across the water and bathing the ocean in orange-yellow light. "It's…it's pretty amazing, this view…"

"This place used to be completely covered in garbage," Shouto comments idly, looking at the glittering sands. "Right up until recently, anyway. No one ever *did* find out who was responsible for cleaning it…"

Something flickers in Midoriya's eyes, but it's gone before Shouto can determine what it is. "Who woulda thunk it," Midoriya says; beside him, Howler gives a strange little muffled sound around the ball in his mouth.

"Anyway," Midoriya says, turning away, "it's a little further up here, the…the place I need to go."

“Alright,” Shouto says, and follows him when he starts. They head down the sidewalk for a while longer, until eventually, the sidewalk cuts into sand, and the slope hits an incline. Midoriya starts up it like he’s done it a million times already, and Shouto follows.

It isn’t high up, but it’s high enough to be its own specific little spot. Midoriya and Howler make it to the top first, and Shouto takes up the rear.

The view is even more breathtaking from up here, if that’s a thing that’s possible. It’s…tranquil, calm; the breeze smells like saltwater, and it’s gentle but crisp, and the sound of waves crashing against rocks and each other meets Shouto’s ears.

Near the edge of the little cliff is what looks like a small, stone shrine.

Shouto takes this in slowly, then all at once—Midoriya starts toward it, and Shouto and Howler follow him.

It’s…a small shrine, handmade, and although it isn’t *perfect,* there’s…there’s something endearing about it, somehow, if that makes a lick of sense. Shouto watches Midoriya kneel in front of it, take in a deep breath, and Shouto makes note of the writings etched onto the headstone.

~ To the heroes the world has forgotten. ~
~ To the heroes the world never knew. ~

Regardless of how impersonal the message is, despite the lack of names, Shouto feels like he’s intruding on something private.

“…Midoriya? Are you…sure you want me here?”

“I don’t mind you here,” Midoriya answers shortly, raising his head to look at him. It’s hard to read the look on his face. “I’ve…had this set up for a little while now. You’re the first person I’ve shown it to.”

Shouto nods, unsure of how he feels about this. He should be honored, but the tone of Midoriya’s voice leaves him feeling…doleful.

“…Is it…is it for anyone in particular?” Shouto asks, and he’s not sure he should, but the words are out and he can’t take them back.

“Not…not any*one* specifically,” Midoriya answers slowly, fingers clenching a handful of sand. “I just…there are a lot of heroes out there who, y’know, don’t get proper burials. Who give their lives on the

battlefield, and...and aren't even remembered. Sometimes...people don't even know they're there. I...I set this up for them."

Shouto nods, taking this in. "...Does it have anything to do with the spirits you summon?"

"...Yeah."

Shouto takes a breath, then lets it out. "...Did you know them personally, Midoriya? Any of them?"

Midoriya inhales sharply. "...Not when they were alive, no."

Shouto stares at the horizon, the sun setting, the orange-yellow waters, gleaming in the dying light of the sun.

"...It...It seems almost stupid, doesn't it?"

Shouto whirls around to look at him. Midoriya doesn't look back, rather keeps his head down while his fingers clench around the sands around him.

"I-I mean...it's just...some sentimental thing," Midoriya says, shaking his head. "It doesn't help them *now,* you know? I-It's just, I-I wish...I wish there was something else, y-y'know? Something...something a little more *meaningful."*

There's a lump in his throat, but Shouto doesn't show it. Midoriya Izuku is...a lot of things. If someone asked Shouto to pin him down with one word, he wouldn't be able to do it. Midoriya is strong, powerful, dangerous, even terrifying at times, but in the end...when it boils down to it…all he wants to do is save people. It's just the person he is.

"...I don't think it's stupid."

Midoriya's head snaps up, but this time, Shouto looks the other way, eyes poised towards the horizon.

"...What you're doing here, Midoriya...you're ensuring that they aren't forgotten," Shouto elaborates. "Constructing this memorial...even if it doesn't directly *help* those who have given their lives...no one wants to be forgotten. Nobody wants to disappear, to...to live and to die, and then, just...be written off, like they didn't even matter. Like their life meant nothing. And...what you're doing here...you're making sure that doesn't happen."

They meet eyes.

"...If the heroes who gave their lives on the field, the heroes you're talking about...if they saw this," Shouto says, "...I'm sure it would make them really happy. You're keeping their memory alive, Midoriya, and...that means something. That's what I think. So...don't call it stupid. Okay?"

When Midoriya nods, Shouto notices his tears, but decides not to comment. He watches the sunset while Midoriya kneels in the sand before the shrine, and eventually, once Midoriya gets to his feet, red-eyed but with more spring in his step than before, the two head out.

They bump into Kirishima, Iida, and Uraraka right around Midoriya's apartment complex; it's Uraraka who notices them first, raising a hand cheerfully in greeting and hollers a chipper, "Hey! You guys!"

"Uraraka," Midoriya greets, smiling; Shouto steps forward alongside Midoriya, flanked by Howler. Iida and Kirishima move forward with Uraraka to meet them halfway, and despite the fact that Midoriya had been in the hospital up until yesterday, the air is lighter than it's ever been.

Maybe it's *because* Midoriya's just gotten out of the hospital that the atmosphere is so light; everyone is relieved that he's alright, so it only makes sense.

"So." Midoriya claps his hands together and smiles at the group. "Should we go inside?"

Shortly thereafter finds the five of them (or, rather, six of them, including Howler) sitting in the Midoriyas' living room. The apartment is...small, but cozy; the complete opposite of Shouto's family home. And plus, he's surrounded by friends here, so that's a huge bonus.

Midoriya Inko is a wonderful woman. Shouto only met her for a moment, when she greeted them at the doorway before heading into the kitchen to finish up curry for dinner, but he'd been able to determine that she seems a lot like Midoriya in a lot of ways; kind, gentle, caring, but with power under control. The Midoriya family isn't one Shouto wants on his bad side.

"You guys like Go-Fish?" Midoriya asks, returning from his room with a deck of cards. "I played it a lot while I was in the hospital, but

maybe I'll finally have a good chance at beating someone now."

"Who'd you play at the hospital?" Kirishima asks, genuinely curious.

"Toshinori-san," Midoriya answers, taking a seat on the floor; the others sit down with him in a circle, and Howler tucks himself at Midoriya's side and lays there. "He's really good, and it's *not fair.* This is the day I finally redeem myself."

Toshinori-san. Shouto still doesn't know who he is, really; he makes a mental note to ask Midoriya about it sometime.

"It's mostly luck," Uraraka says, taking cards as Midoriya deals them out. "I don't think there's much of a 'strategy'..."

"If you memorize other players' cards as the game goes," Iida says pointedly, straightening his glasses, not because they need to be straightened but because this is Iida and being dramatic is his thing, "it's much easier to thwart the enemies' tactics."

"Whoa, whoa, enemies?" Kirishima says, putting up his hands. "Why can't we just, y'know, have a fun game?"

"Enemies," says Midoriya darkly, gathering up his hand of cards and looking them over.

"Enemies," agrees Uraraka.

"Enemies," Shouto says flatly, just because.

Iida nods solemnly. "Yes. Indeed."

It's hard to read the emotion on Kirishima's face, but if Shouto had to narrow it down to one word, he'd say, "fear."

"Kirishima, you got any—"

"Probably not."

"—Twos?"

"...Oh, actually, yeah I do, here."

"It's actually looking pretty good this round. I think I have a chance —!"

“Midoriya, do you have a seven?”

“STOP GANGING UP ON ME.”

“Do you have a seven, though?”

“…Yes.”

“VENGEANCE WILL BE MINE!”

“Midoriya, do you have a five?”

“NO!! MY *VENGEANCE!!”*

“Todoroki, do you have any eights?”

“Why don’t you ask Midoriya?”

“Thermostat no.”

“Anyway, no, I don’t have any eights. Go-Fish.”

“Alrightee.”

“Hey Midoriya, you have any eights?”

“LEAVE ME ALOOOONE!”

Midoriya comes close, a few times, but he never actually wins. It’s Uraraka whose victories towers over the rest of them, and she cheers and pats herself on the back while Kirishima lays face-down on the floor in defeat, Midoriya doing the same (though his ghost may or may not still be in his body, Shouto can’t tell), and Iida mourns his loss but overall turns it into determination, saying that he “will not be beaten next time.”

It’s nice to see Iida back to his old self. Shouto isn’t sure how much of it is a facade, but he knows for a fact that *most* of his behavior here is genuine, and that’s good. It seems he’s beginning to move forward, then, one single step at a time.

He supposes that’s all they can do, any of them.

Dinner is simple. Inko-san lets them eat in the living room, and they play a few more rounds of Go-Fish (Uraraka and Iida win once, Shouto

twice, and Kirishima and Midoriya not at all). It's...nice, to be able to hang out like this on the weekend without any pressure. Definitely not something he's used to.

After that, it's...it's calm. They sit back on the couch and talk; Midoriya looks exhausted, but he isn't struggling to keep his eyes open (yet), so Shouto doesn't comment.

"Are you going back to school this Monday, Deku?" Uraraka asks, leaning over the couch across from Kirishima to look at him. "Or are you going to stay home and rest some?"

"Nah, I'll be back at school Monday," Midoriya answers. "The wound already closed up and everything, so as long as I'm not too tired, I think I'll be fine."

"Well, don't push it, man," Kirishima says, shaking his head. "If you feel like you gotta stay home tomorrow, there's no shame in—"

Across the room, a door slams unexpectedly. All heads immediately turn in that direction; the five of them are in the living room, and they can hear Inko humming in the kitchen.

So how…?

"...What was that?" Kirishima says, eyes wide. "Hey, Midoriya, your house isn't haunted, is it? I mean, you're practically a ghost so, if it was it'd make sense…"

"Oh, no, that's just Howler," Midoriya answers simply. "Before I got him and started training with him, he was enlisted in this other service dog program, so he learned a lot of little things like that, like how to open doors. He only started doing it recently, though."

"That's odd," Iida says, cradling his chin in his hand, "but I suppose that makes sense."

"He turns the lights on and off, too, sometimes," Midoriya says, shrugging. "Guess it's just part of his charm. We all have our own little quirks."

"Deku so help me I *will* throw a pillow at you."

Iida lets out a huge sigh and gets to his feet. "I'll be following Howler."

Midoriya looks betrayed. “Hey, wait, no, come back!”

“Wait, you already used that joke!” Kirishima objects, giving Midoriya playful shove that *almost* sends him right off the couch. “You can’t use the same one twice!”

“It’s the first I’ve heard it,” Shouto says, blinking. “…And hopefully the last.”

Midoriya laughs. “Don’t be that way, Freezer Burn! I’m hilarious!”

“Whatever you say, Danny Phantom, whatever you say.”

It’s Kirishima who laughs while Uraraka groans, and *eventually* Iida joins them again, and they spend the rest of the evening in an odd state of calm, relaxed tranquility.

He doesn’t know for how long they stay there, together, in Midoriya’s living room.

It’s a long time, though. And, to Shouto, time well-spent.

It’s Uraraka who first comments that she has to leave, and she and the others gather by the door for their farewells.

“Thank you for having us!” Uraraka says, bowing lowly; Inko-san reacts immediately, shaking her head and reaching out to touch Uraraka’s shoulder.

“It’s alright, no need for formalities,” Inko-san says, smiling. “I’m glad you came over. Thank you for coming.”

“You bet!” Kirishima says, throwing an arm around Midoriya’s shoulders. “I’m just glad my buddy here’s okay. He freaked us all out quite a bit.” He ruffles Midoriya’s hair a tad rougher than he should. “Gotta stop doing that.”

Midoriya laughs shakily, but nods, smiling. “I’ll do my best,” he says. “Uraraka-san, if you’d like me to, I could walk you home—”

“I’ll do it,” Kirishima cuts in immediately. “You stay here and rest up, ya hear?”

Midoriya doesn’t seem very happy about it, but he nods anyway. “Thanks for coming, Uraraka,” he says instead of complaining, and Uraraka beams and nods once.

“I should be going as well,” Iida says, stepping up. “My brother is getting discharged tomorrow, and we need to finish making alterations to the family home.”

“Ahh, I see,” Midoriya says, nodding. “Thanks for coming, Iida. Tell Tensei I say hi. Give him a pun from me.”

Iida sighs. And that’s it.

They finish bidding their farewells shortly thereafter, and Iida, Kirishima, and Uraraka leave, waving their hands over their heads. Midoriya returns the gesture with both arms, and Shouto waves with a single hand.

Once they’re out of sight, Midoriya turns back to him. “Do you have anywhere to be, or are you staying later?”

“I mean...I don’t know,” Shouto says, pulling his phone out of his back pocket. There haven’t been any new messages from Father for a while now. “I told my sister I was visiting a friend, but I didn’t tell her when I’d be back, and Father hasn’t texted me…”

“If you wanna stay for longer, you can,” Midoriya says simply, like it’s as easy as asking how’s the weather. “It’s the weekend, so I’m not super worried about staying up later than normal.”

Shouto gives him a look. “You just got out of the hospital yesterday.”

“I’m fine.”

“Midoriya.”

“I want you to stay,” Midoriya says sharply, and it would be flattering if not for the tone of his voice. After a second, he lets out a long sigh, running both hands through his hair. “S-Sorry, today’s been...really up and down for me. I-I think it’s the meds, but—”

“No, it’s fine.”

“But, I—there *is* something I want to talk to you about,” Midoriya says, shifting his weight. “And I should’ve told you this a long time ago.”

Shouto frowns at him. “How long ago?”

“Like, Sports-Festival long ago.”

“That wasn’t that long ago.”

“It is, considering what I want to talk to you about.”

Whatever Shouto was about to say next gets swallowed by a sudden spike of concern—and confusion. He looks up; the sky is dark, clouds closing in, and the nice chill the wind had earlier has turned into a vicious bite.

“...We should go inside,” Shouto says. “We’ll talk then.”

Midoriya nods, and they do just that—but not before Shouto notices Howler give Midoriya’s hand a concerned nudge.

“Okay, talk to me. What is it?”

Midoriya bites his lip uncomfortably. They’re sitting on Midoriya’s bed in his room, Midoriya up by the headboard and Shouto sitting on the edge near the foot of the bed. Howler is curled up in the middle of the bed, though his head is up, alert.

And he’s looking at Midoriya.

Midoriya bites his lip for a long moment, then takes in a breath.

“...During our fight, at the Sports Festival…”

A lot of things flash through Shouto’s mind at those words; he remembers Midoriya screaming at him, crying, throwing untimely, messy punches and kicks that he somehow managed to land every time. He remembers his own rage at Midoriya’s words, remembers—

“Oh,” Shouto says, blinking. “...I stabbed you with a piece of ice.”

“Nonono, that’s not what I was going to say!” Midoriya says quickly, too quickly, and he waves his hands back and forth. “I-It’s not a problem, really! If I didn’t see the scar earlier I probably would’ve forgotten about it—!”

“It scarred?”

“Nononono, it’s fine, it’s fine!” Midoriya insists, this time shaking his head while he waves his hands. “I-I was trying to get a rise out of you back then, I deserved it, believe me. It’s, y-y’know, one of the things I

do." He stops waving his hands around, rather lowering them into his lap and staring down at them. "Talking during fights like that and just, shouting at my opponent, it...it helps me get my own thoughts together, if that makes sense. B-But, like I said, it's my fault I made you angry—"

"I was trying to hurt you, though," Shouto says, and as he speaks the words, the realization really hits home for him, too. "...It's like that one time...when Bakugou kept beating you up instead of just using the capture tape to end the lesson."

(Midoriya winces, but doesn't comment.)

"It's like that," Shouto says heavily. "I wasn't trying to beat you fairly in the fight anymore, I just—I wanted you to shut up."

"Fair—"

"Midoriya, I'm not kidding."

"No, I know you aren't," Midoriya says heavily, and he sighs longly, shutting his eyes for a moment. "I know you aren't. But...I get it. People get angry, and...and they do dumb things. And sometimes they do dumb things that hurt other people. But that...that isn't what they set out to do. Bakugou wanted to hurt me just because, I-I mean, he's *Bakugou* and he's always had it in for me, but...I-I know that the things I said at the Sports Festival probably hurt you, too, and...and you hurt me because you were upset."

"I know, but—"

"'But' isn't going to change anything," Midoriya cuts in. "I already had a long talk with Iida about this, but—I'll just say—try to move on from this. It happened, but, it's in the past, y'know? So...just know that I forgive you, one hundred percent, and I hope that you'll be able to forgive me, too."

"...You really are too golden-hearted for your own good."

"Pft." Midoriya rolls his eyes, but just for a second. "Anyway...I guess, this brings me to what I want to talk to you about…"

"Oh, yeah. Sorry, I got off-track there."

"It's okay, I did too." Midoriya takes in a breath, then lets it out. "So, you know I, um, summon the dead sometimes, right?"

The last time Shouto had heard Midoriya say something along these lines, it'd been in a voice full of confidence and determination. Now, his voice is small and hesitant.

"Yeah," Shouto says. "I had a short conversation with that spirit back in the alley, remember? He called me Mr. Fahrenheit."

"W-Well, I-I...you might've noticed," Midoriya says, fiddling with a pillow, "the spirit who fought with us had a lot of scars."

Shouto nods. "I noticed," he says. "What does that have to do with the Sports Festival?"

"I...have a few theories about the scars," Midoriya answers. "I-I originally thought it had something to do with, like, past injuries, but...I think they're emotional scars. 'Scars on your spirit,' I guess you could say. And...during the Sports Festival...I-I...I saw yours."

"...My...what?"

"Your spirit. I saw your spirit."

Shouto blinks at him. "...How…?"

"It...i-it didn't last for long," Midoriya says slowly, "it...just flickered once or twice, but...yeah. And...T-Todoroki, you…"

(It's almost weird, hearing Midoriya call him that; usually it's "Thermostat," not Todoroki.)

"...You had *so many* scars," Midoriya says thickly. "And...and I only just thought about it, now, after summoning that spirit to fight Stain, and I...I really should've brought it up before, but…"

Shouto swallows thickly. If these scars are emotional scars, like Midoriya assumes (most likely *rightly* assumes) they are, then that...that makes perfect sense. And Shouto hates that it makes perfect sense.

"...And since you told me about your fath—Endeavor," Midoriya goes on, "I...I just...I'm sorry."

"...It's fine—"

"It's *not.*"

"Midoriya." Shouto turns to him fully, and Midoriya meets his eyes.

"...Right now, there's...there's nothing you or anyone else can do about it. It sucks, yeah, of course it does, but...but there's nothing you can do about it."

Midoriya bites his lip and stays silent for a long while.

"...Actually...there's one thing."

Shouto blinks at him. "What are you…?"

"I'll be right back," Midoriya cuts in, sliding off the bed and to his feet, and a second later the door is closing behind him, and he's gone.

Shouto looks at Howler, and Howler puts his head down, unconcerned. He waits for Midoriya to get back, a bit impatient just because he's confused, but it isn't long before the door opens, and Midoriya hurries inside again.

"Here," Midoriya says, sitting down on the edge of the bed by Shouto and pressing something into his hand. "It's not much, but it's all I can do."

Shouto looks down. He sees a small key, bronze, with an empty little keyring.

"I...I know it's not, y'know...it doesn't solve the problem," Midoriya says, "and I know it's nothing huge or super special, but, I mean...if something happens where you just, don't feel like you can take being in the same house as Endeavor, just...feel free to come over. Any time, any day, just, whenever."

Shouto raises his head. "Are you...are you sure?"

"Yeah, I'm positive," Midoriya answers, nodding. "I talked to my mom about it, too, and she's fine. I didn't tell her everything about your family situation, but...she was okay with me giving you a key."

Shouto stares down at the cool metal for a long moment, and then considers the Midoriyas' small apartment in comparison to the Todoroki estate.

The Midoriyas are opening their home to Shouto as a safe-house, somewhere he can go if need be, somewhere he can be away from his father. Shouto has never had anything like that before, and just the thought of having an escape, the thought of knowing that he could *leave* and not just, end up sleeping on a park bench or something…

It's...it's a good thought.

Shouto closes his fingers around the key. "...Thank you, Midoriya. I...I appreciate it."

Midoriya nods simply. "I wish there was more…" he says, trailing off, and Shouto pockets the key, making a mental note to put it somewhere Endeavor will never find it. Maybe he'll put it on a necklace around his neck, take one out of Midoriya's book…

A thought strikes him.

"...Midoriya."

"Yeah?"

"...You had scars on your spirit, too."

Midoriya blinks at him—and then, he exhales sharply through his nose and shakes his head back and forth.

"...It's, y'know," Midoriya says, "it's nothing, compared to your situation...it feels almost wrong to talk about the two on even ground…"

"You have scars on your spirit, though," Shouto says, and the realization sinks in for him now, too.

Midoriya says nothing.

Shouto takes in a breath, then turns to face his friend fully, swinging his legs onto the bed and crossing them. It occurs to him now that Midoriya knows most everything about Shouto's home life, his family situation, the things he's been through.

But,

"I don't really know much about you, now that I think about it," Shouto says, waiting for some kind of reaction. "Your childhood, how you grew up...your father…"

Midoriya *does* flinch a little at this--a reaction Shouto had been watching for.

"...My father, he...ahh…" Midoriya bites his lip, fingers threading through Howler's fur. "He...he abandoned us."

Shouto says nothing, taking in this information, silent, just as Midoriya had been for him when Shouto told him his own story. Midoriya hesitates for a long moment, then goes on.

"...I...don't remember anything about him," he says, curling his fingers around a handful of Howler's fur. "Sometimes I think I remember something, y'know, like a face, or a voice, but...I'm pretty sure that's me coming up with stuff, just to fill the space."

Midoriya lets out a long, shuddering sigh, then shakes his head again. "I don't miss him. I can't, not when I don't actually know who he is. And I always had to wonder why, y'know? Why did he leave, why didn't he come back, was it my fault...stuff like that."

"It wasn't your fault," Shouto says. "You know it isn't."

"The what-ifs are always there, though," Midoriya says, "and...and a little kid who doesn't know any better, I-I mean...sometimes those 'what-ifs' seem more real than anything else. And...like I said, it seems...unfair, to compare it to your situation, but...I just..."

Shouto inhales deeply, then exhales the same way. "...Guess our fathers both suck."

"Yours sucks more, though," Midoriya says, turning to him. "I want to punch my father in the face for leaving us, but...I wanna dropkick Endeavor off a building."

Shouto chokes on something—his intake of breath, his spit—and then he's laughing. Sort of. It's breathy and soundless and it feels...odd, and he's not sure his body was meant for laughter, but either way.

Midoriya stares at him, wide-eyed and stone-faced at the same time. "I'm dead serious."

"I know, I know you are," Shouto says, smiling faintly. "Let me know if you ever decide to actually do it, though. I'll bring a camera."

Midoriya snorts.

"Except…" Shouto pauses, thinking. "You might not want to dropkick him. You'll break your leg."

"Okay, okay, but hear me out." Midoriya shifts to face him fully, raising his hands and gesturing. "We make a *giant slingshot--"*

The odd, half-laughter is back, and it lasts for longer this time. Shouto almost doesn't want it to end.

"But...back on topic," Midoriya says, serious once again, "I guess that's probably where some of my spirit-scars came from. The rest of them, I mean...my childhood was less than stellar. I won't go into any details, but, I mean...it was rough. My classmates, they...never liked me much. My Quirk freaked them out. I had to transfer schools once, and they tried...pranking me for a first impression. I freaked so hard I dropped out of my body and, well, you can imagine how that went. I ended up smashing my face against a desk, which is why--" He traces the scar on his face with a finger. "...Yeah. After that, they just kind of...ignored me. But...my childhood was...well, it wasn't as bad as yours, but it wasn't the best."

Shouto nods, hums, but doesn't ask for any more details. He's sure there will be time for that, just not right now.

"My classmates ignored me, for the most part," Shouto says instead, and it's easy to talk to Midoriya about these things, though he doesn't fully know why. "A lot of them wanted to be my friend, early on, but it was just because I was a Todoroki. They didn't want anything to do with the real *me,* they were just interested because my dad was a hero."

"Yeah, that...that's hard," Midoriya says softly. "...That reminds me, Todoroki, I'm...I'm sorry I called you Thermostat, that one day, when I was mad at you. If you want me to stop calling you it, I will."

"No, it's fine," Shouto says, waving a hand idly. "I actually kind of like it."

Midoriya stares at him. "You do?"

"Yes. In fact, it wouldn't make a bad hero name. 'Thermostat.'"

Midoriya blinks. "...Are you serious."

Shouto blinks back at him. "Yes. Why wouldn't I be?"

There's a beat—and then, Midoriya *cackles,* though he tries (and fails) to stifle it behind his hand. Shouto stares at him.

"What's so funny?"

"I can never tell whether or not you're *serious* when you say stuff like

that," Midoriya answers breathlessly, trying to get his giggles under control. "You're serious? Changing your hero name to Thermostat?"

"...Okay, I won't lie, I was *kind* of joking."

"Kind of."

"It would make a good hero name, though."

"Thermostat. Literally Thermostat."

"Yes. To answer your question, though, as long as you don't mind me calling you Spearmint, I don't mind you calling me Thermostat."

Midoriya smiles at him. "Deal."

A silence befalls the room for a long moment. It isn't uncomfortable; actually, it's...oddly peaceful. A nice change.

"...I want you to tell me, if you need someone to be there for you," Midoriya says out of nowhere. "If...if you need someone to hear you out, if you need someone to listen...I want you to let me know, okay? It doesn't matter what time it is or anything like that. Call me at two in the morning and it won't make a difference. But I want to be there if you need someone to talk to."

It's unexpected, but at the same time, in light of recent events, it shouldn't be that unexpected at all. Shouto swallows, then nods, taking this to heart.

"And I want to be here for you, also," Shouto says. "If you want someone to talk to, or just...I don't know, want some validation...I'm here for you, too."

Midoriya nods shakily—and then, he turns to Shouto fully and holds out his arms.

Shouto stares at him. "What."

"A hug," is the answer. "If you're okay with it—and only if you're okay with it—I'm offering you a hug."

"A...hug."

"Yes."

Shouto hasn't been hugged since...well...since Uraraka pounced him in

the waiting room at the hospital. The situation had been so dire and dark back then, and Shouto had been so numb, that he almost hadn't felt it at all.

And here he's being offered a hug, and...it's...it's strange.

But he accepts it.

He accepts it, and he's tense when Midoriya's arms close around his shoulders, but he finds himself embracing him back, although he doesn't remember moving.

It doesn't end quickly.

It *does* end *abruptly,* though, when Howler tackles the two of them and nearly sends them tumbling off the bed. Midoriya laughs while Shouto tries getting his breath back, and a second later, the hug breaks, and Midoriya is reaching over his desk for his laptop.

"How do you feel about dumb cat videos?" Midoriya asks, already opening the laptop and pulling up his browser. "It's a nice pass-time, and I found some really hilarious stuff while I was in the hospital…"

The whiplash is just like Midoriya, really. He always likes to bring things back around to some semblance of joy and happiness. Shouto nods, moving to sit beside Midoriya while he opens a few tabs. The whiplash definitely isn't unwelcome.

Howler hops off the bed, and a moment later, the light goes out, and the dog's weight dips the bed once again. Midoriya scrolls through a couple saved videos, then clicks on one in particular.

Shouto has absolutely no idea how long they sit there, how long they laugh at the videos and, even more so, at Howler's reactions to them, but...whether it be ten minutes, or even ten hours, it's...it's nice.

Really nice.

It's nice to see Izuku hanging out with friends, even though the circumstances aren't exactly...ideal. Inko has been worried *sick* for Izuku the past two-three weeks, ever since receiving that message from the hospital regarding Izuku's condition. That has blown over now, and Izuku is home recovering, but still.

His friends are lovely. Inko has met most of them already, with the

exception of Shouto, although Izuku has told her a lot about him. Inko watched their fight at the Sports Festival, too, which had been...concerning, to say the least, but they seem like genuinely good friends now, which Inko couldn't be happier with. She's always gotten the feeling that Izuku didn't tell her *everything* about Shouto, but that's fine, too. Either way.

Izuku wanted to give Shouto a spare house key, which was...an odd request, all things considered. Izuku had known Tenya, Ejirou, and Ochako longer than he's known Shouto, and yet it's Shouto who Izuku wanted to give the house key to.

And there's a reason for that. There's always a reason, when it comes to Izuku, and Inko had half a mind to ask him why, half a mind to question it, but...she didn't. She asked him if he trusted Shouto, to which Izuku answered that, yes, he absolutely did, and that was enough.

She'll never forget the smile that lit up Izuku's face when she agreed, and honestly, she has her suspicions. A friend Izuku hasn't told her everything about, and now Izuku offering his home to said friend, it's...telling, that's certain. Inko has her suspicions.

And once those suspicions are there, it's not just Izuku who is more than willing to let Shouto have a spare key to the apartment.

Shouto wakes up feeling more rested than he's ever felt in his life. He blinks his eyes open, slowly, the first rays of morning sunlight stretching across the bedroom. He notices a weight on his stomach later than he should've, and he blinks the remaining sleep out of his eyes to look.

Midoriya is sprawled on top of him sideways, sleeping soundly, his face smushed in the mattress. Curled on top of Midoriya is Howler, sleeping equally soundly, not even stirring when Shouto shifts to try and get into an easier breathing position.

Eventually, he gives up, flopping back down on the bed and blinking up at the ceiling of Midoriya's room.

Wellp, he thinks, taking as deep a breath as he can considering his current predicament, *this is my life now.*

Despite his struggle to breathe with the weight of Midoriya and Howler on top of him, he's oddly okay with that being the case.

Chapter End Notes

So this was the last cool-down chapter, so now we're launching right back into the action here! Final exam arc coming up soon, whoop whoop! I'm really looking forward to that, actually, which is odd because it is *not* my favorite arc shdfksdf.

But!! I think you guys'll like what I do with it!! (At least I hope you do shdfkjdf.) Thank you all so much for all your encouraging words! Your support really means the world to me and I love you all dearly. :)

Until next time, go beyond! PLUS ULTRA!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story

Chapter Summary

"Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story" from Hamilton

“Let me tell you what I wish I’d known,
When I was young and dreamed of glory.
You have no control
Who lives,
Who dies,
Who tells your story.”

Chapter Notes

ARTTTTT!!!! :D

bokunoherokomikuko (Warning: Blood)

austrailanpup

hybridfandomgirl

Thank you all so much!! Enjoy the chapter! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

[Midoriya]
Don’t forget you have the key, okay?
Feel free to come over anytime you want to.

[Shouto]
I appreciate it. Thank you.

[Midoriya]
Yeah, you bet. I’m sorry I can’t do more.

[Shouto]
It’s fine. This is more than enough right now.
Thanks.

[Midoriya]
Np!

Shouto closes out of his messenger and stuff his phone into his pocket. On his way home from the Midoriyas that Sunday afternoon (after having breakfast with them—Midoriya's mother had insisted Shouto at least stay for breakfast), he'd stopped by a shop downtown to pick up some cord, and now, the key hung around his neck, tucked beneath his shirt where Father can't see it.

There are other hiding places, he's sure, but he isn't positive his father doesn't snoop his room, so he figures his best bet is to just, keep the key on him at all times. Besides, having it on him means he won't have to retrieve it first should he need it.

"Shouto! Where the hell are you!?"

Shouto sighs, sliding off his bed. He doesn't call back, just turns on his phone again, types and sends one quick, final, last-minute message to Midoriya.

[Shouto]
I mean it. Thanks for everything.

He isn't expecting a reply; he leaves his phone behind and takes two steps forward toward his door before his phone lets out a cheerful *ding!* behind him. With a frown, he retraces his steps and looks at the message.

[Midoriya]
You don't have to thank me. I'm glad we're friends!

Shouto loses his breath for a few moments.

[Shouto]
Me too.

He leaves his phone behind, but he takes Midoriya's message with him.

Izuku is laying on his back with Howler sideways across his stomach, his phone held loosely between his fingers and arms sprawled on the bed on either side of his head.

"If I *do* end up drop-kicking Endeavor off a building," Izuku says, looking at Howler, "will you cover for me?"

Howler responds by dropping his head onto Izuku's ribcage,

unconcerned.

“Yeah I didn’t think so.”

The silence stretches, and Izuku looks up at his ceiling, thinking. It’s nice to just relax, but…so much has happened these past couple of days, *so much;* since fighting Stain in that alleyway, Izuku has seen Dai’s death, learned more about him and the ex-holders, officially met Kibō, met “All For One”’s brother, Mirai (and Izuku still has no idea who All For One even *is),* and everything just feels…too much.

“Something the matter, sweetheart?”

“No, I’m…I’m fine,” Izuku says, taking in a breath, “just…thinking. I should…I should probably ask Toshinori-san about All For One, shouldn’t I?”

The voices in his head are silent for a time.

“…Honestly,” says Aki, *“I think you should. Considering our position here, I mean…it could technically be our place to tell you who he is, too, but…”*

“Toshinori’s your mentor,” Yukō cuts in. “He’s *your mentor, not us. If you feel like you’re ready to know, go ahead and ask him.”*

“He’ll tell you,” Nana says, though she seems almost hesitant. *“He’ll tell you, if you ask, but it’s like Yukō said.”*

“Yeah, I get it,” Izuku says, still staring up at the ceiling. “I’ll ask him, then. Tomorrow.”

So that’s one problem down, but another thing that’s been bothering him is the fact that out of the seven ex-holders in his head, he’s only seen five of their deaths so far, which leaves Yukō and Mirai. A part of him wants to ask them how they died, if just so he can prepare himself, but…that’ll just make him paranoid, probably, because already, these dreams are unpredictable. If he learns the state in which the final two ex-holders died, he’ll probably never sleep again.

So he doesn’t ask. He’ll find out eventually. And probably sooner than he wants.

“I meant what I said,” Izuku says, not just to Dai *this* time, but to all of them. “I don’t know who All For One is, yet, but…I’m guessing I’m going to have to go up against him someday, right? I-I mean, all of you did already, and so did Toshinori-san, so…it stands to reason that

I'll be next. And…when that happens…I'm going to do whatever it takes to beat him. I promise. And the seven of you…you'll be able to move on and rest in peace."

"…Be careful," Kibō says, and honestly, those are *not* the first words Izuku is expecting to hear after that final declaration. *"We appreciate it, we really do, all of us, but, Izuku, you…you must,* must *be careful. All For One is dangerous, and…whatever you do, you have to think about your life before you think about anything else."*

And suddenly Izuku thinks of Dai. He thinks of Kibō kneeling over him, desperate, and he thinks of her fear, her pain, not just Dai's, as his life was stripped away from him. And Aki, too, crying, begging, in denial.

Then he thinks of himself and Toshinori. Todoroki. Iida. Uraraka. Kirishima. Mom. The people who'd be put in the places of Kibō and Aki should he himself be put in the place of Dai.

(He'd gotten a small taste of that, actually, after fighting the Hero Killer.)

"…I'll be careful," Izuku says, when the rest of the ex-holders add nothing to Kibō's words. "I promise. When that time comes… *if* that time comes…I'll do whatever it takes to stay alive."

The kid comes back on Monday morning to gather his things, and honestly, it's nice to see him up and about; when Gran Torino saw what'd happened on the news, he'd been worried, not that he was one to openly admit that out loud.

Instead,

"So you finally came to grab your stuff, boy," he says, when the doors open to reveal the boy and his service dog. Morning sunlight streams into the house, and it's hard not to revel in its warmth. "Good. For a while, there, I didn't think you'd ever come back."

Izuku smiles at him—or, well, it's more of a grin, less sincere than a genuine smile. "Sorry," he says, "was too busy being hospitalized to notice."

There's mirth in his voice and he obviously means it as a joke—*obviously*— but Gran Torino can hardly take it as one. Vaguely, he remembers Toshinori calling him, asking desperately what had

happened, if he knew what'd happened, and Gran hadn't known a thing. He'd received the call in the midst of the aftermath of the Hosu situation and was more than a little confused by Toshinori's desperation. Villain attacks are devastating, sure, but it's nothing new. Certainly nothing that would make the great "symbol of peace" sound so frantic and panicked like that.

Except it wasn't the villain attack he'd been worried about.

"Thanks for teaching me, Gran Torino," the boy says, bringing Gran back to the present. The kid's grin is gone, replaced with a softer, more genuine smile—and maybe there's some embarrassment there, too. "I'm sorry the internship was, y'know...cut short."

"Bah, don't worry about it," Gran Torino says, waving a hand at him. "It's not like it was your fault. I'm glad you're safe, kid, now go get your things. You've got school, don't you?"

He nods and sprints up the stairs, beckoning his dog to follow him (which Howler does in a heartbeat). Gran lets out a huge sigh and sinks a bit more of his weight onto his cane.

Getting that call from Toshinori, hearing his desperation...it'd reminded him of something. It was like Gran had been taken back in time, when he was talking to a younger Toshinori, a kid, a high schooler, asking desperate questions in a stream of mangled, choked words and pleas.

And denial. So much denial.

He hears a little tingle of a bell and straightens up again. The kid is back a second later, dragging his suitcase, and his dog stands beside him with the handle of a silver briefcase between his teeth. Gran hadn't noticed before, but the boy is wearing his medical bracelet, something Chiyo had called and informed him of previously.

"Thanks again for everything," Izuku says, bowing shortly, then straightening up with a smile. "I was able to use a couple things you taught me against the Hero Killer, and of course I wouldn't have learned how to use Full Cowl without you."

"Pft, don't thank me, I just gave ya a couple nudges in the right direction," Gran says, shaking his head. "You're a pretty smart kid, so I doubt you wouldn't have figured it out eventually."

"Maybe, but still. Thank you."

Gran doesn't think the kid will take any other answer, so eventually he accepts it. "You're welcome, kid. Now go; if you're late to school it's not my fault."

Izuku nods, bows one more time, then turns and starts towards the door with Howler right by his side. Gran Torino turns away and begins to walk in the other direction.

And then he realizes that he never heard the door close.

He turns. Izuku is still standing in the doorway, back to him, hands to his sides.

"Well?" Gran says, frowning. "What are you waiting for?"

"It wasn't your fault, you know. That she died."

Gran's breath catches in his throat. "...Kid. How did…"

Izuku exhales sharply and shakes his head, though he doesn't turn towards Gran at all. "Little birdie told me," the kid says, and even though there's that typical mirth in his voice, it's underlined with this bone-deep sorrow and heaviness that Gran didn't know it was possible for a fifteen year old to bear.

"...Nana," Izuku goes on thickly, as though he needs to clarify. "She...she doesn't want you to blame yourself. She knows you do, and...and she understands how you feel, but...she wants you to move on."

"...Kid—"

Izuku ignores him. "She wants me to remind you that she's gone. She wants me to remind you that she's *gone,* but...but she'll never...she'll never truly *leave* you, or...or Toshinori-san. She's here, she's watching, and...and she wants you to move forward. If just for her sake."

And Gran finds himself speechless. Nana Shimura has been gone for so long; the seventh wielder of One For All, two whole generations behind them, and yet...and yet here she is again. Gran thought he'd live through this guilt his entire life. Up to this point, he has. With her gone so suddenly...her gone, leaving a successor behind, alone...there had been no reconciliation. No peace.

No goodbye.

And here enters Midoriya Izuku, a kid Gran is still trying to actually *figure out.* The kid has this presence about him—or, rather, a *lack* of presence unless you know he's there—and he's driven, determined, selfless, even to the point of taking a knife to the chest for a friend, and those are all admirable traits for any hero-to-be (though his lack of self-worth is something they need to work on)...

And then he talks to spirits, is friends with the ex-holders of the power he now wields. He drops his body like bricks and moves freely as a spirit, and he has that odd scar splitting his face that Gran hasn't actually had the chance to ask about.

Midoriya Izuku. The ninth wielder of One For All. Two generations since Nana, and here he is. Here he is, and Gran knows Nana is here, too. Maybe he's always known; maybe he's only truly *realizing* it, now that he's met this boy, now that Izuku has told him these things.

Before now, the thought of moving on had never occurred to him. It wasn't a thing he'd ever thought he could do. And he knows it's not something he'll ever get over, losing Nana. The pain will be there, and even as time passes and it becomes easier to bear, it'll never leave. Never.

But...hearing that she wants him to stop blaming himself. That she wants him to keep moving forward. That even though she's gone, a part of her will always be *here*…

Maybe some of his guilt can finally be abated.

"...You're a really special kid," Gran says, when he finds his voice. "Never change, ya hear? Don't *ever* change."

The smile the boy gives him is bright and sincere, and for the briefest of moments, Gran sees Nana.

Izuku's hand lingers on the door long after he's closed it behind him, and he lets out a long, heaving sigh, then reaches up and wipes his burning, watering eyes.

"Thank you for doing that, kiddo," Nana's voice murmurs softly, and he feels her more than he hears her, a soft, gentle vibration through his chest that's oddly comforting. *"I...I know that was hard."*

Izuku holds his breath, then lets it out with a shaky nod, finally releasing the doorknob. "Yeah, t-that..."

It *hurt,* that's what.

"Thank you, though. Thank you so much."

Izuku nods, spins on his heel, and starts down the porch, his suitcase bouncing behind him and Howler trotting joyfully at his side with his empty briefcase. His hero costume had already been taken back to U.A. and is undergoing repairs, as far as he knows.

He almost makes it to the end of the porch before he hears the door open behind him again.

"Hey, kid, hold up!"

He turns. Gran Torino stands on the "welcome" mat in front of the door, hand still on the knob. He raises his head, and Izuku meets his gaze.

"I want you to tell me who you are," Gran Torino says.

Izuku frowns at him. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, who are you, kid?"

"Midoriya Izuku."

"No, not that. *Who are you, Midoriya Izuku."*

Izuku frowns for a long moment, contemplating.

And then he gets it. It clicks. He raises his head again and beams, throwing up what he knows is a totally cheesy salute.

"Deku," he says. "My name is Deku."

Gran Torino grins at him. "Wear it proudly," he says, "and no matter what happens, no matter what you go up against...never forget who you are. Who you want to be."

Izuku nods firmly. "I won't!"

"Gran?"

"I can't decide whether your successor is an angel or a nightmare, where did you even *find* this kid?"

Toshinori lets out a sigh, and Gran can imagine him shaking his head. *"I've known the kid for about a full year now and I ask myself that question every day,"* he says heavily. *"The kid's a lot of things, but honestly, I don't think I could have found a better person to carry One For All."*

"Yeah, now that I've had the chance to actually get to know him a bit, I don't think you could've, either." Gran pauses a moment, then lets out a sigh. "You haven't told him, have you? The origins of One For All?"

The stretch of silence that follows is all the answer he needs.

"...You should tell him," Gran says at long last. "Even if it's hard, the kid has every right to know. You know that."

"I know, I know, he does. I'll talk to him today after his classes are over."

"Yeah, do that," Gran says, nodding to himself. "...I'm sure you've already noticed, but, that kid...he reminds me a lot of Nana."

"...Yes. Yes, he does."

"He's a good kid," Gran goes on, and he thinks of Midoriya's parting words, and the things Nana asked him to relay. "He's going to make one hell of a hero, that's for sure."

Toshinori laughs, softly but genuinely. *"That, that he will."*

Izuku's friends are waiting for him on the front steps when he arrives.

"Sorry for keeping you!" Izuku says, rushing up to them. "Thanks for waiting up, though. You didn't have to do that."

"Well, we wanted to make sure you got here before we went in ourselves," Iida says simply, like that's literally the only way they could've gone about today. "Speaking of, how are you feeling?"

"I'm feeling great, actually!" Izuku says, beaming. "Which is, y'know, kinda strange considering I was in the hospital up until recently…"

They head inside afterwards, and Izuku leaves his suitcase in the locker room to take with him on his way home tonight. He makes quick work of dropping his empty briefcase off to the Support Group, telling his friends to go on without him and that he'll only take a minute.

Hatsume is working on something that looks awfully a lot like a grenade when he walks in, and he has half a mind to spin around and walk right back out.

But she spots him, so it's too late. "Ahh, Ten Million!" she greets, swinging back her welding mask and grinning at him. "Returning the case, I see?"

Izuku nods, taking said case from Howler and setting it on the desk, a generous (a very, *very* generous) distance away from the odd, grenade-shaped object in question. He doesn't dare ask.

"I already repaired your costume," Hatsume says, beaming at him, "and I finished with the extra stuff I talked to you about, too! I can't wait for you to try it out! I just *know* you'll love it!"

When it comes to Hatsume, Izuku never really knows what to think, but either way, he smiles. He thanks her, bows, and then power-walks out of the workshop.

As he turns the corner, he hears an explosion, followed by a muffled something that sounds like, *"My bad, my bad!"*

He walks faster.

Class 1-A is *ecstatic.*

Well, at first they don't even notice he's there, of course—but when they do they're all over him, and they're all talking at once, telling him how worried they were when they heard the news, how glad they are that he's alright now, how it's great to see him again.

For Izuku, the feeling is absolutely mutual. Getting back into the swing of things is exactly what he needs, now, and seeing his friends is always a huge morale booster.

Homeroom is straightforward, as are the usual classes that come afterwards; Izuku jots down notes, asks to be excused briefly during English to take his pain meds, and when he can, he offers Kaminari a word of advice (or two...or three...or ten…) regarding today's studies.

"I appreciate the help, Midoriya," Kaminari says, laying a hand on his shoulder, "but I am what you would call a 'lost cause.'"

"Rest in pieces," says Sero, shaking his head. "You will be missed."—

And that really, really doesn't help Kaminari's confidence at all, but honestly, there's not much that *will* at this point.

The first half of the day is uneventful. Toshinori ("All Might" of course) pulls him aside after lunch for a moment or two, asks if he's alright and if he should really be back at school so soon, to which Izuku replies that he's fine and that he wouldn't be here if he wasn't ready to handle it.

All Might nods, but doesn't seem fully convinced. "Hero Basic Training might be a bit strenuous, later on," he says. "If you feel like you need to sit out, don't be afraid to say so."

"I won't," Izuku says, "but I'm sure I'll be fine. The doctors patched me up pretty good."

"You also wrecked yourself pretty good."

"Well, yeah, but I'm fine," Izuku says. "I promise I'll back out if I think I need, to, though."

All Might nods, though he seems distracted. "Please do. The last thing you need is to overdo it and wind up in the hospital again."

Howler gives Izuku this very distinguishable *look,* and Izuku rolls his eyes, then looks back towards his mentor, who is turned the other way.

"...Is...something the matter?" Izuku asks, frowning. "You...seem kind of off, if that makes sense. What's wrong?"

All Might says nothing for a long moment.

"Later," he says at length. "We'll talk later."

Izuku frowns at him again, but doesn't push it. Instead, he makes a mental note that there definitely *will* be a later, remembers the things he himself wanted to ask his mentor, then returns to finish lunch with his classmates.

Things don't really get interesting until Hero Basic Training later on that afternoon, when All Might takes over the classroom with his trademark flamboyance, any trace of previous uncomfortableness gone. The students of Class 1-A had been asked ahead of time to put on their costumes and meet at Field Gamma, which they did.

There's an enormous viewing area set up just beyond the front gate, complete with a ridiculously huge wide-screen television and a platform on which onlookers could stand and watch.

"This is your opportunity to show off what you learned in your internships!" is the goal of this lesson, apparently, according to All Might. The basic premise of it is fairly simple: All Might will release a signal from somewhere within Field Gamma, and a small group of students will race to find it. Simple, straightforward, just something to get people back into the swing of things, let them show off what they learned.

Hatsume definitely outdid herself with Izuku's costume. The design is still the same, but there are tons of additional add-ons; like braces for his forearms and shins, thin but sturdy, and of course the biker-esque helmet, the same teal green as his costume.

It's funny, the one time he has his full costume and all its parts, is the one time he doesn't actually need it to fight against villains. The irony is almost hilarious, and a part of him wants to laugh.

He, Sero, Ashido, Iida, and Ojirou are the first group to go. Izuku catches Bakugou glaring at him out of the corner of his eye, but Izuku ignores him in favor of following the others into Field Gamma.

They spread out, each taking their own platform in different sections of the training field, and Izuku shuts his eyes momentarily, concentrating. One For All spreads through his veins until his skin lights up, and he opens his eyes again, waiting for the signal.

Full Cowl is actually easy to keep up now, despite he hasn't practiced with it for very long; maybe it's because he's already used to using One For All as a ghost, spreading it through the entirety of his spirit that way—

The buzzer sounds, and he leaps.

"Whoo! You've got this, kiddo!"

"MAKE US PROUD! I BELIEVE IN YOU!"

"Show Blasty McSplody what for!"

"Ooooo, that's gotta hurt."

“I warned you to be careful, sweetheart, pipes can be tricky—”

“Wellp, guess you can’t win ‘em all. Good try though, Midoriya!”

“DON’T STAY DOWN, GET UP AND KEEP GOING! EVEN IF YOU CAN’T MAKE FIRST PLACE, MAKING IT TO THE FINISH LINE IS ADMIRABLE, TOO! GO, GO, GO!”

He does make it to the finish line. He finishes *last,* of course; Sero is receiving his pat on the back by the time he gets there, dragging his feet a little even as the ex-holders cheer him on.

“SAFE!”

“Yeah! Made it!”

“Fifth place ain’t bad!”

“Um, fifth place is las—”

“OY!”

“I appreciate it,” Izuku says, quietly, “but I lost, this time. But I mean…” He raises his head, smiling a bit. “…I’ve come far since first inheriting One For All, so…I can’t really be that upset about it.”

“How noble.”

“Doesn’t mean I have to be happy about it.”

“Good grief, grandpa, it’s one race—”

“If you keep calling me grandpa I’m just gonna start callin’ ya Steve.”

“Worth it.”

Izuku is so indulged with the conversation in his head that he doesn’t notice All Might approaching until he’s tapped on the shoulder.

“That was incredible,” his mentor tells him, and Izuku blinks. “It was like looking at a totally different person. You’ve come so far in such a short amount of time; I’m proud of you.”

Izuku can’t help but smile, but it ends quickly when he hears a hint of heaviness in his mentor’s tone again.

"...Once the exercise is over," All Might goes on, when Izuku opens his mouth to ask what's wrong, "meet me at the teacher's lounge. We have a lot to talk about."

Izuku *really* wishes they could talk *now,* but he nods and returns with Sero, Ashido, Iida, and Ojirou to the viewing platform to watch the next group of students.

Everyone did amazingly. It's really something special, being able to see how far he and his classmates have come since their internships. Uraraka was able to keep herself in the air for short bouts without getting nauseous too many times, Kirishima broke through the sides of buildings instead of going around, not to mention everyone else.

They all did really well, and Izuku watched and cheered them on from the sidelines along with the rest of his waiting classmates.

...Except then, he's heading towards the teacher's lounge to speak with All Might. He picks up Howler from Recovery Girl on his way over—he'd left him with her for the exercise—and then he's heading down the hall again, dreading this conversation.

"Something's definitely up," Nana says—she's the first ex-holder to speak in a while. *"He's been acting strange all day."*

Izuku bites his lip. He hasn't known All Might for as long as Nana, but he's still able to pick up that something isn't right here. He nods his agreement with Nana, then pivots and turns to stand before the door of the teacher's lounge.

He takes in a breath, reaches for the handle, and pulls the door open.

Toshinori is already there (as "Toshinori," not All Might), and he has his head down, fingers threaded loosely together. Izuku pulls the door shut behind him and Howler, feeling like someone had just dropped a piece of ice down the back of his shirt.

"...My boy," Toshinori says, looking at him briefly. He gestures to a stool set up across from the couch. "Have a seat, please."

Despite the casual setting, the atmosphere is tense, and Izuku crosses the room wordlessly and sinks onto the stool across from his mentor.

There's a long moment in which Izuku can't be sure whether to try meet Toshinori's eyes or simply look the other way. Toshinori keeps

his head down, and neither of them say anything for a painfully stretched moment.

"...How was the internship?" Toshinori asks at long last, finally meeting Izuku's eyes. "You've made great leaps and bounds regarding your physical One For All. How's the spiritual aspect going?"

"Oh, it's, um, I mean, erm...it's...it's there," Izuku says, rubbing the back of his neck. The tension is so thick it'd take more than a nuke to plow through it. "...I summoned the, erm…" He pauses, thinking for a moment. "...I summoned the fourth holder during the fight with the Hero Killer, and afterwards I summoned him and his mentor simultaneously with no unusual backlash, so I think it's going okay…?"

"I'm glad." It sounds forced; not insincere, just forced. "As long as you aren't pushing yourself beyond your boundaries."

"I'm not."

"Pfft, yeah, sure."

"Shut up," Izuku hisses.

"That brings me to one of the things I want to talk about," Toshinori says, calling Izuku and Aki out of their argument. "The Hero Killer. I'm assuming he nicked some of your blood during the fight?"

"Yeah," Izuku says, nodding. "He uses a person's blood to paralyse them, I think. It was kind of a spur of the moment theory, so I could be wrong, but…"

"No, you're right," Toshinori says, sitting a little straighter. "Do you remember what I told you the day I gave you One For All?"

"Well, not all of it. It was quite a hairy situation, though."

"...Kid."

"I've got a million of them."

"No, I know you do, just—"

"Should I *shave* them for later?"

"Kid."

“It appears we have come to a...split end.”

“Kid please.”

“Wellp, guess I’ll *dye.”*

“Izuku. Think about it.”

Izuku stops, frowning. “What?”

“The Hero Killer,” Toshinori says, “One For All, passed on through DNA…? Are you...not worried that he may have stolen One For All?”

“He can’t, though, right?”

Toshinori blinks at him, shocked.

“I mean,” Izuku says, shifting a little on his stool, “One For All can’t be stolen. The current wielder has to want to give it up...right?”

He poses it as a question, but he already knows this for a fact—witnessing the ex-holders’ deaths have taught him this much. All For One, the villain, had asked them to give up multiple times; if he really wanted One For All so badly, he could’ve stolen their DNA at any time, either while fighting or after killing them.

So.

“You’re right,” Toshinori says, nodding. “One For All cannot be forcefully stolen, though it *can* be forcefully passed on. I’m a little surprised; I was expecting you to be worried.”

Izuku nods, though his thoughts are elsewhere. “Toshinori-san, who is All For One?”

The question is out before he registers thinking it, and he meets Toshinori’s gaze as both their heads snap up. For a long moment, nothing happens.

And then, Toshinori lets out a huge sigh and shakes his head.

“The ex-holders,” he says solemnly. “You heard that name from them, right?”

“Yeah,” Izuku says, looking down, feeling suddenly uncomfortable. His eyes land on the scars on the back of his hand, and he studies them for a while. “I-I mean, it’s kind of hard not to be curious,

y'know? And...just the names are so similar. 'All For One,' 'One For All'...it's like, like...two pieces in a puzzle."

"I'd say 'black and white' is a better way to describe the relationship between the two," Toshinori says quietly, but it's clear that he intended for Izuku to hear.

Izuku swallows. "Toshinori-san…?"

Toshinori takes in a deep breath. "...When Quirks first manifested," he says, "many, many generations ago, the reaction from the rest of the world was mostly the same. The idea of superhumans was unheard of, and mobs rioted in the streets, trying to get rid of those who were born with superhuman abilities."

Izuku nods, just to show that he's listening.

"Things have changed since then," Toshinori goes on, "and now it's become such a normal thing that the Quirkless of us—myself included—are the ones shunned by society."

Something clicks. "W-Wait!" Izuku says, eyes wide. "You mean, before One For All—!"

"Yep, I didn't have a Quirk at all," Toshinori answers, nodding. "But, nonetheless, my mentor believed in me and entrusted me with this power, and, well, the rest is history."

Dai was Quirkless, too, Izuku thinks—an afterthought. *I wonder if more of the original holders were Quirkless…*

"But, that's today," Toshinori says, raising his head again. "Times have changed. When Quirks first began to show themselves and the 'normal' people began leading revolts against them, the entire world was thrown into chaos and disarray. Right up until... *he* rose up."

There's no name given, but Izuku doesn't need one. "All For One."

Toshinori nods. "A being with the power to steal Quirks," he says, "to cultivate their powers for himself...and to force them on others. In a way, he was a morbid, twisted, 'Symbol of Peace' himself back in the day, though the people followed him out of fear, not admiration."

"So…" Izuku swallows. "What does that have to do with One For All?"

"All For One had a Quirkless little brother," Toshinori goes on, "who

opposed him and his twisted ways. All For One...out of pity, resentment, spite, who knows...forced a stockpiler Quirk on his little brother."

Izuku's breath gets stuck in his throat.

"Except, the little brother was only *thought* to be Quirkless, when in reality, he possessed what most would consider to be a completely useless Quirk...the ability to pass on power to others."

And suddenly it becomes clear to Izuku. Everything clicks in the span of an instant.

"That is One For All," Toshinori finishes, resting his hands in his lap again and entwining his fingers together. "The younger brother knew he wouldn't be able to defeat his older brother with his current power, and passed on the Quirk to the next generation, who cultivated it and passed it on, who cultivated it and passed it on, and so on and so forth, all the way, right up until…"

"...You faced him," Izuku says, and as he says it, the real force of this realization hits him head-on. "...Six years ago, you…"

Toshinori sighs longly, then nods, the movement small. "I did face him," he says, "and, for the longest, *longest* of times...I thought I'd defeated him. But...recently, the police force and a team of doctors ran a couple of tests on that Nomu we took captive after the USJ, and...what they found was the DNA record of a past convict, and an unsettling amount of of Quirks. Which, of course..."

Izuku's ears ring. He feels suddenly sick.

"...The Nomus…?"

He sees Toshinori's eyes widen through his tunnel vision. "Kid?" His voice seems to come from far away, and Izuku barely hears it, staring off into space, line of sight tilting, stomach turning.

"I killed one," Izuku says, quietly, but he can hear every word through the blood in his ears. "At Hosu, I—I brought down an entire building on it. I killed—" It's getting harder and harder to breathe around the acid rising in his throat. "I killed a *person—"*

Toshinori's hands find his shoulders before Izuku sees him move, and his grip is painfully tight but also grounding, so Izuku doesn't complain.

“Kid. Kid, listen to me.” He shakes him, ever so slightly, and Izuku meets his eyes. Toshinori’s gaze is stern, serious, with no room for argument—and so is his voice. “All For One killed that man, not you. Alright? All For One, not you.”

Izuku nods, shakily, though he’s not fully aware of the movement, and Toshinori leaves his hands on Izuku’s shoulders until his breathing returns to a normal rhythm and he returns to some semblance of awareness.

“S-Sorry,” Izuku says, and his mentor finally releases his shoulders and sits back. “T-That…that was…”

“A natural response,” Toshinori cuts in, before Izuku can say anything degrading. “But it wasn’t your fault, and it wasn’t you who killed that man. It might take some time to get over, but…you can’t blame yourself for that.”

Izuku nods again, still shaky and desperate to move on. “S-So, you were saying, about All For One.”

Toshinori gives him an odd look, but doesn’t comment on the sudden change of topic. “Yeah,” he says instead, nodding. “All For One is the only being out there who could do such a thing, which means he somehow survived his injuries and is out there now, orchestrating behind the scenes inside the League of Villains.”

It takes a moment to register this, with his head still spinning and whatnot, but he manages a nod.

“I’d hoped that, when I fought him, it would be over,” Toshinori goes on heavily, “and that my successor wouldn’t have to go through the same pain as me and the past holders did. But…I’m starting to think One For All is cursed.”

Izuku looks down at his scars again, swallowing back the remaining acid in his throat. The voices in his head are dead silent (heh—no, *no,* bad joke, bad timing, *no),* and a part of him is thankful for that; it’s easier to think this way.

But…

“I guess that means I’ll have to face him someday, right?”

Toshinori raises his head, and Izuku gets to his feet, meeting his eyes with steely determination.

“Whether One For All is cursed or not,” Izuku says, “whether or not it’s a road of pain and suffering, it’s the road I chose, and I’m going to walk it. No—I’ll walk it *with you.* With you, with *them,* we’re all going to walk it.”

“…Midoriya—”

“And we’re going to end All For One!” Izuku says, with confidence he isn’t sure he has. “All of us, holding this power, cultivating it from generation to generation…we’re going to do it, you know! We’ll break the chain of suffering All For One started, we’ll end the cycle!”

“Kid—”

“All of us!” He feels hysteric, and he doesn’t know why. “And when that time comes…and I face All For One…I won’t be alone. As long as I have the past holders—as long as I have *you,* I feel like I can do it! That’s what I think!”

He’s expecting agreement.

He’s expecting the ex-holders to break out in cheers.

He’s expecting Toshinori to nod, to say something, anything.

But what he isn’t expecting,

is *silence.*

Stone-cold, dead, empty *silence.*

Toshinori says nothing. The ex-holders say nothing. Izuku’s hands drop back to his sides and sway limply for a moment.

Say something.

Toshinori looks down at his hands.

Say something.

Anything.

…Why…

…Why aren’t you saying anything?

Why won’t you agree?

Why…?

"…Toshinori-san?"

"Ahh, sorry, kid, it's nothing," Toshinori says, raising his head. The smile is so fake it hurts. "Just me being a worry wart, don't mind."

"He's lying."

The voice is Nana's, and the tone is icy and stabbing and Izuku feels like someone just dropped a dozen ice cubes down his back.

"He's lying, Izuku, he's—"

"Why are you lying to me?"

Toshinori's head snaps up to meet his gaze, and Izuku doesn't know what kind of expression he's wearing, what his mentor sees on his face. He feels nothing yet; he feels something creeping in on his heart, though, something…

…Something…

…*Something…*

"Midoriya, I'm—"

"Don't lie to me." Izuku's eyes burn, and he shakes his head feverishly. "D-D-Don't…d-don't lie to me. I-If you think it's funny, it's not funny, it's really not."

"Midoriya, listen—"

"It's not funny."

"Midoriya—"

"You can't tell me you won't be there!" Izuku shouts, before he's even aware that he's raised his voice. "You *have* to be there, Toshinori-san, you have to!" He feels something wet on his face, but he doesn't remember crying. Howler is by him, nuzzling his leg, but Izuku ignores him.

"And even if you're not *right there!"* Izuku rambles on, hysteric, desperate. "Even if you're not *right there* next to me, you have to be alive! Y-You have to see it, All Might!"

There is still no agreement. Only his mentor's wide, guilt-ridden eyes. "Izuku—"

"I've seen their deaths!" Izuku shouts, and this isn't how he wanted to tell Toshinori this; he'd wanted to do it in his own time, when he was ready, but the words spill out of his mouth and he almost wishes snatch them back. "I've seen their *deaths,* I've watched—I've watched them *die,* one after the other, Nana, Senshi, Aki, Dai, Kibo—I've already watched their murders, a-and I watched—"

He isn't sure whether or not he has Toshinori's attention; his vision is too blurred for him to tell.

"They're like family to me!" The words feel thick and heavy and he has to spit them out, voice cracking, chest heaving. "A-And...a-and...and *so are you!"*

"Kiddo—"

"So don't tell me you won't be there!"

He can't be sure how many words are actually coherent, choked and strangled by his sobs and hysterics.

"You have to be there, you have to!"

He can't breathe anymore. His chest is burning, and it's not because of his wound, though it is a very tangible, painful sensation.

"Y-You have to, T-Toshi—T-Toshinori-s-san, you have to. Y-You...you just *have to…"*

There are arms around his shoulders, and even though he's angry, Izuku returns the embrace wholeheartedly.

He'd been selfish. Toshinori had never been one to give his life much regard; he'd give it up in a heartbeat when it came to others, sacrifice himself like a martyr. He'd never... *cared,* much.

But he'd been selfish, because when he thought things like that, when he thought of his willingness to throw his life away at the drop of a hat, he'd never considered his successor at all. He'd never considered that even though *he* didn't care about his life, well, he's not the only person *in* his life.

He'd been selfish, because it's not just about *him* anymore. And maybe

he'd overestimated the strength of his successor, when in reality there's only so much a fifteen year old kid can take before they crack under pressure.

"I'm sorry," Toshinori finds himself saying as Izuku sobs. "I'm sorry, kiddo. I've...I've been selfish. I'm sorry."

"You have to *be there,"* the kid chokes out again, voice muffled. "You have to *be there,* you…"

"I will."

He finds his resolve, and it's a resolve he hasn't had in a long, long time.

The resolve to live.

"When that day comes," Toshinori says, tightening the embrace, "...I'll do my damndest to be there."

Chapter End Notes

> I'm so sorry about not getting to all the comments again shdfksdf. I TRY BUT DSHFKJSDF I'M SORRY I'M SUCH A BUM I READ ALL THE COMMENTS AND THEY GIVE ME LIFE SO THANK YOU SO MUCH EVERYBODY!!!
>
> We're launching into the Final Exams arc next chapter, so I'm excited!! \o/ I'll do my best to update soon!! :D Until then, stay awesome, you beautiful, incredible peple, and remember to always go beyond!! PLUS ULTRA!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Congratulations

Chapter Summary

"Congratulations" from Hamilton

“You have invented a new kind of stupid.
A ‘damage you can never undo’ kind of stupid.
An ‘open all the cages in the zoo’ kind of stupid.
‘Truly, you didn’t think this through?’ kind of stupid.”

Chapter Notes

ART! :D

chiangyorange

artforfics

For the heck of it, here's a little doodle I did of a scene in chap. 24

Thanks for the art!! :D

Also, here's my guide to the ex-holders of One For All! I promised this to y'all a long time ago and finally got around to making it! :D

Enjoy the chapter, y'all! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Good morning,” Izuku greets as he sits at his and his friends’ usual table at the cafeteria. Howler curls up at Izuku’s feet, and Izuku sets his tray down and takes up his chopsticks.

“...Deku, it’s the afternoon,” Uraraka says, eyes shining with concern. “Are...you okay?”

“Not gonna lie, dude, but you’ve seemed kinda off all day,” Kirishima comments, pointing at him with his chopsticks. “Did something happen, or…? Are you okay…?”

Izuku inhales deeply then says in a single breath, *“I’ve had a rough past couple of days.”*

Across from him, Iida exhales sharply through his nose. It isn’t a

laugh; Izuku isn't sure what it is. "Makes sense," Iida says, clicking his chopsticks once or twice pointlessly. "To be fair, you *did* just get out of the hospital a few days ago. I'd imagine it's been challenging."

Todoroki gives Izuku a look he can't decipher, not that it matters. Izuku shakes his head and snatches up his chopsticks with a long, heaving sigh.

"Just, one normal day," Izuku says. "One normal day, that's all I want. Is it too hard to ask for?"

It's a trick question, so his friends don't answer. The voices in his head make a few comments; he's pretty sure Aki says *mood,* though most of it is lost within his own thoughts.

The mid-term arrives in a flash. Even before getting the results back on the written exam, Izuku was confident that he'd done well, so it doesn't surprise him that he came fourth.

Except, he can't really say the same for the rest of his classmates…

"This is the end," Kaminari says, draping himself face-down across Ashido's desk. "This is really the end, isn't it."

Ashido flops on top of him sideways. "Jobless, homeless, here I come."

"It's your fault for not participating in class!" is Iida's answer; Izuku ducks beneath one of his arms as he swings it, gesturing. "If you paid more attention to our teachers, you wouldn't struggle so much!"

"I *try!"* Kaminari groans, and Ashido groans her own agreement and disgruntlement. "I mean, I'm bad at everything, but it's the math that *really* kills me!"

Izuku opens his mouth.

"One pun," Kaminari says, wiggling a finger at him threateningly. *"One pun,* I dare you."

Izuku snaps his teeth together.

"Seriously, though," he says, when he's sure the first thing out of his mouth won't be a math-related joke, "you shouldn't beat yourself up so much, y'know? I'm sure you'll do better next time! Besides, this is just the mid-term, so you still have a few weeks to study before the final."

“There’s still the practical exam, too” Jirou says idly, twirling the cord of one of her earphones around her finger. “Even though you guys totally bombed the mid term and probably won’t do much better on the written part of the final, there’s still a chance for you, yet.”

“Hey, that’s right!” Kaminari’s and Ashido’s heads snap up simultaneously, and they grin at each other, finally dragging themselves off the desk and to their feet.

“We’ll do it!” Kaminari says enthusiastically, grinning. “This’ll be our chance to redeem ourselves, y’know! We can’t let it slip away!”

Izuku nods, equally enthusiastic. “I’m sure you’ll both do great!” he says—and then, as an afterthought, “Wait, do we actually know what we’re doing for the practical exam?”

“Robots!” Sero says, leaning so far back in his chair that if it weren’t for Uraraka catching it, he would’ve tipped right over. “I talked to a third year, and apparently we’re battling robots again, like we did in the entrance exam.”

“Oh!” Kaminari and Ashido say in unison, turning and grinning at each other. “Robots!”

“We can do that!” Ashido says, beaming brighter than ever. “Those robots were a piece of cake to take down back at the entrance exam! This’ll be *easy!”*

“Robots again?” Iida pauses, frowning. “I find it odd that they’d continue to use robots in spite of all that’s happened recently…”

“Who *cares!?”* Kaminari says, throwing up his hands. “We’re passing this exam no matter what!”

Izuku smiles, but his thought process betrays them all. *Why do I get the feeling that you just jinxed it?*

“Thank you all for coming out today!” Principal Nedzu says raising a ha...hand? Paw? What?...at the newly arrived students. They’re all wearing their hero costumes, as was required of them, and they’re standing before Nedzu and a group of pro heroes—Midnight, Cementoss, Eraserhead, All Might, Present Mic, along with several others.

Izuku suddenly has a very odd, distinguishable sinking feeling.

Oh boy...

"As you have already been informed," Nedzu says, in a high pitched voice that really shouldn't be possible, "today you will be taking the practical portion of your final exams!"

"Robots!" cheers Ashido, who thinks she knows what she's talking about. "Like in the entrance exam!"

"Nope!" says Nedzu, and he says it so cheerfully it's like he enjoys crushing their dreams, which he very well might, actually, now that Izuku thinks about it. "You students will be paired up in teams of two and pitted against one of us teachers here at U.A.!"

Kaminari and Ashido's smiles don't let up, but Izuku can tell that they're internally screaming.

"Yes, you heard right!" Nedzu goes on, and he gestures both hands like he's getting to the best part of a grand story. "Your teams have already been established, as well as which of us you will face! For instance, Kaminari and Ashido will face me!"

They're still smiling.

"Is...is this hell?" Kaminari asks.

"Something like that," Ashido answers, beaming brilliantly, eyes shut.

"Now then!" Nedzu claps his...paws...with a smile, beaming at the group of students standing before him in a way that *wouldn't* be menacing, if it'd come from anyone else. "Our chosen teams are as follows: Kirishima and Satou, up against Cementoss."

"Nice!" Kirishima and Satou say simultaneously, grinning at each other.

"Sero and Mineta, verses Midnight."

Mineta opens his mouth.

"A word out of you," Sero says, flexing an arm, "and I'm taping your mouth shut."

Nedzu goes on: "Todoroki and Yaoyorozu, against Aizawa, Uraraka and Aoyama, against Thirteen, Iida and Ojirou against Power Loader, Hagakure and Shouji against Snipe, Tokoyami and Asui against Ectoplasm, Jirou and Kouda against Present Mic, and Bakugou and

Midoriya against All Might."

Izuku has half a mind to drop out of his body then and there. He meets eyes with Bakugou for the briefest of moments, but it's still long enough for him to see Bakugou's utter contempt and fury, which Izuku understands, though he doesn't retaliate.

He isn't angry, merely...concerned.

And it's bad enough that they're being paired together, but that's not all. They're being paired together against All Might.

"Wellp," Dai says, exactly what Izuku is thinking. *"We're doomed."*

"We're putting Bakugou and Midoriya on the same team for the finals?"

Aizawa nods stiffly. "Yeah."

Toshinori stares at him. "...That's like putting water in hot oil and expecting it to end well."

"I'm aware of that," Aizawa says, shaking his head, "but it's what the principal wants. It's already hard enough dealing with Bakugou and Midoriya in the same classroom, so the principal thought it best to put them on a team together just to see if there's any possibility of them getting along."

Toshinori frowns. "The last time they were pitted against each other," he says, "you know how that *turned out. Do you really think the outcome will be any different if they're forced to work together?"*

"Honestly, I don't know what to think of the two of them. I guess we'll have to see what happens after today, won't we?"

They take a bus to the training grounds on which they will be holding the practical exam. Recovery Girl has a temporary nurse station set up within a cinema-esque viewing area, which isn't very reassuring. She takes Howler with her for the duration of the exam; considering how protective the dog is of Izuku, he'd work himself into a frenzy if he were to watch Izuku fight.

Besides, Izuku doesn't count on Bakugou being at *all* tame. The last time they'd been in a scenario like this was at the beginning of the school year, and...well…

Yeah.

If what happened then is any indication, this is going to *suck*.

Izuku and Bakugou's exam is last; the others go first, two at a time, and Izuku and the remaining students watch, theorize, analyze, and cheer their classmates on although their whoops and shouts can't be heard through the screen.

"Putting you and Blasty McSplody on the same team. What are they, stupid?"

"They probably think it's gonna help them build some kind of mutual...something."

"A mutual 'don't attack each other'?"

"Yeah, that."

"I don't see how that's possible, considering Bakugou—"

"Please stop talking about it," Izuku says under his breath, quiet enough for no one but the ex-holders to hear. "I already have to think about it enough on my own without you guys going on like that."

The ex-holders say nothing on the matter afterwards, rather commenting on the other matches and cheering on Izuku's classmates (they favor Todoroki, Uraraka, Kirishima, and Iida out of the class, unsurprisingly, considering they're Izuku's closest friends at U.A., although in the end they're rooting for everyone).

(Except Mineta.)

The matches fly by as Izuku watches, one after the other; Kaminari and Ashido lose to the principal, as do Kirishima and Satou against Cementoss. It comes close for a lot of teams, and Izuku is almost constantly gritting his teeth behind his lips, but everyone—even those who failed—did well, to some degree.

At least they'll be able to learn from their failures and move on from there.

And then comes Izuku and Bakugou's match, and Izuku feels like he'd just swallowed five pounds of lead as he makes his way outside to the training grounds. He's aware of Uraraka, Todoroki, Iida, Kirishima, and a few others cheering him on as he leaves, but he barely hears

them over the ringing in his ears.

Bakugou is already there when he arrives, waiting at the gate leading inside. Bakugou says nothing to him when he steps up, merely glares, and Izuku has half a mind to say something snarky, half a mind to glare back, but he doesn't. Whether he likes it, accepts it or not, he and Bakugou are on the same team here. There's no room for enemies in the hero world.

The buzzer rings, and a robotic voice announces, *"Team Bakugou and Midoriya, Final Exams, start!"* and Bakugou moves forward with Izuku hot on his heels.

"Why did you do it?"

Bakugou snarls at him, teeth barred. "What?"

"Don't make me repeat myself," Aizawa says, arms crossed. "You know exactly what I'm talking about, Bakugou. Why did you keep pummeling Midoriya into the ground even after he stopped fighting?"

"Are you kidding me?" Bakugou's face does not change; if anything, he seems angrier. "You put us against each other and you expect me to pull punches?"

"The object of the exercise was to defend the weapon," Aizawa says, "not beat up your opponent even after they'd given up. And if that's really the case, Bakugou, then why not Uraraka? Why single out Midoriya?"

Bakugou says nothing. It's odd.

"You exhibit no restraint," Aizawa goes on, "and if things continue the way it is now, you might want to start considering another career."

"What the hell?" Now *he speaks, and there's more venom in his tone than ever. "What are you—"*

"If you really want to be a hero so badly," Aizawa says, "it'll show. Believe me, it'll show. But, in all the while you've been here so far, Bakugou...I've seen nothing."

Bakugou hasn't said a word to him since the start of the exam, and Izuku bites his lip, thinking of what to say. Eventually, the silence gets to him, and he jogs until he flanks his classmate.

“So,” Izuku starts, a little uncomfortable—Bakugou’s silence is almost more terrifying than his outbursts, “I’ve been thinking about strategies for a while now, and I think the best way to do this is to strike true, maybe catch him by surprise, and then book it while we—”

“Shut up, Deku.”

Izuku stops. Bakugou keeps walking, one step after the other.

“I don’t need your help,” Bakugou snaps. “If you’re gonna follow me, don’t get in my way. I’ll beat All Might without you.”

“What, are you serious?” Izuku jogs to catch up again. Bakugou walks faster until it’s a near-brutal pace. “You really think you can beat the *Symbol of Peace* in a fight? I hate running as much as the next person, but we have to pick our battles smartly—”

He sees it, for a second, and then something slams into the side of his face and sends him tripping and stumbling backwards, until he finally loses his balance and hits the pavement below.

It takes him an extra second to realize that Bakugou just punched him in the face with a gauntlet.

Izuku stays on the ground, cradling his jaw, other hand braced against the asphalt. When he raises his head, his eyes meet Bakugou’s narrowed, furious ones.

“Stay away from me,” Bakugou seethes, and then he spins on his heel and continues marching down the street in the other direction, leaving Izuku behind.

Izuku sits on the ground for some time, fists balled against the asphalt, shoulders trembling.

And then something snaps.

He leaps to his feet, yanks off his helmet, and hurls it at Bakugou.

He hits his mark; the helmet smacks Bakugou in the back of the head, and with a roar that sounds less of pain and more of anger, Bakugou whirls around to face him again.

“What the hell was that for!?” Bakugou demands furiously. “What’s your problem, huh!? Do you wanna die!?”

“My problem!?” Izuku shouts back at him before he can fully gather

his thoughts, eyes narrowed. “What is *wrong* with you!? What did I ever *do* to you to make you hate me like this, Bakugou!? All I ever did was respect and admire you, so how did things turn out this way!? If there’s a reason, I deserve one, don’t you think!? Or even *is* there a reason!?”

“Shut up!” Bakugou snaps at him, like Izuku knows he will. “I told you I don’t want your help, so get out of here!”

“Why don’t *you* shut up and just *listen* to me for once!” Izuku snaps right back, chest burning with anger. “Maybe if you *did,* we wouldn’t have so many problems!”

“Kiddo, incoming!”

That’s the only warning he gets before he hears the creak and crack of metal against metal and rubble hitting the asphalt.

He barely has time to brace himself before an insanely powerful gush of wind crashes over him and Bakugou.

It throws him off his feet, dirt and dust getting in his eyes; Bakugou lets out a strangled shout of something behind him, caught up in it as well, and Izuku hits the ground rolling and tumbling. Guardrails uproot themselves from the sidewalks; asphalt splits and cracks and chunks of building flies through the air.

It ends as quickly as it began, leaving the street torn and decimated beyond repair. Izuku pushes himself up on his hands and knees, coughing; a little ways across from him, Bakugou does the same.

“Who gives a damn about the city?” a familiar yet somehow *terrifying* voice booms down the street, and Izuku raises his head as All Might walks towards them, taking slow but long, deliberate steps.

“I’m a villain, heroes,” All Might says, and there’s something very different, very *dark* about his tone of voice that sends chills down Izuku’s spine. *“I’m* the one you should be fighting, don’t you think?”

“Bakugou, come on!” Izuku shouts, hopping to his feet. “We can’t fight him head-on, we have to regroup—!”

“Don’t tell me what to do!” Bakugou snaps back at him, running in the opposite direction, towards All Might. “I don’t want your help, so get out of the way!”

“You’re *kidding* me, aren’t you!?” Izuku demands. “There’s no *way* you can—!”

Bakugou pulls back his fist and fires off a blast at All Might’s face.

Of course, Izuku thinks, grinding his teeth. *Of course he goes for it anyway, of course he does. Of course he does.*

Balled fists shaking at his sides, he spins and runs towards the fray. All Might grabs Bakugou by the face as the explosions continue; and then, without wasting another second, All Might decks Bakugou into the asphalt.

“You know,” All Might says, straightening up—Bakugou doesn’t move, “usually when you cover a person’s face, their initial reaction is to move your hand, but you kept firing off those blasts anyway. Even though it only stung a bit…”

He raises his head and locks eyes with Izuku.

Great, Izuku thinks, shoulders slumping. *Thanks, Bakugou.*

“Don’t think I haven’t forgotten about you, Young Midoriya,” All Might says, and his grin is the same, though it’s somehow much more fiendish in nature this time. “You’re the one who wants to run away, aren’t you?”

“Yep, that’s me,” Izuku says, taking a step backwards. “Always the coward.”

Something flickers in All Might’s eyes, but he doesn’t get the chance to do anything; Bakugou rears up behind him, fist pulled back, sparks flying.

All Might doesn’t even flinch. He swings around, grabs Bakugou by the arm, and sends him flying at Izuku.

It happens in an instant, and Izuku doesn’t have time to brace himself. Bakugou slams into him, taking them both to the ground; Izuku’s head smacks the asphalt, and stars dance before his eyes; he almost, *almost* regrets hurling his helmet at Bakugou.

Bakugou is the first to regain himself and get to his feet, and he does exactly what Izuku knew he would; he gets up and storms towards All Might again with long, deliberate strides.

“Are you an idiot!?” Izuku snaps at him as soon as his vision clears, and he jumps to his feet and starts after him. “We have to fall back, at least until we can come up with some kind of strategy—!”

“Shut up!” Bakugou says for what feels like the upteenth time. “If I needed your help I—!”

“You *do* need my help and you know it!” Izuku yells, teeth gritted. “Maybe if you’d look past your ego for *ten seconds* you’d finally be able to see what’s right in front of you!”

“Yeah!?” Bakugou rounds him, eyes narrowed. “Say that to my face, I dare you!”

“I *am* saying it to your face!” Izuku shrieks at him. “You’re just too blind by your own stubbornness and pride to *see it!”*

“As entertaining as this is to watch,” All Might says, “I think it’s high time I make my own move, don’t you think?”

“Come at me!” Bakugou challenges, spreading his arms, like Izuku isn’t even there anymore. “I’ll take you on!”

“Bakugou, *don’t!”*

Izuku reaches out, and his fingers snake around Bakugou’s wrist.

He isn’t sure what he’s expecting, but he’s blasted back off his feet before he registers Bakugou’s arm swinging at him. Smoke fills his eyes and lungs, and he slams into the pavement again for what feels like the tenth time today.

It hurts no more than it did the first few times, but it hits home harder for some reason.

“Don’t you *dare* touch me!” Bakugou yells at him. “You think you can talk me out of this, but you’re wrong! You forget what you are, you damn imbecile!”

“Oh, and what is that!?” Izuku snaps around his coughs. “I *know* what I am, Bakugou, but the question is, what are *you!?* My whole life, you’ve called me a monster, but I’ve chosen the kind of person I want to be now, and you can’t change that! But when I look at *you,* Bakugou...I don’t know *what* kind of person you’re trying to be! I’m going to be a hero, but—what about *you!?"*

“Go away!” Katsuki yells at him, fingers curling around a handful of dirt. “You’d better get away, or you’re going to be sorry!”

“I-It’s just my Quirk!” Izuku insists desperately. “I-I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to scare you—!”

“You don’t scare *me!” Katsuki snaps, and maybe he says it to convince himself. “You’re a monster, Izuku, so get away before I have to fight back!”*

He lies to himself.

“Don’t try anything,” Katsuki growls; Izuku jumps, nearly dropping his armful of school books. “I’m not afraid of you, so don’t think I’ll hesitate.”

“I-I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Izuku says, and his voice cracks. “I-I don’t understand, K-Kacchan—”

He’s always lied to himself.

“You’re the one who did it, aren’t you!?”

Katsuki slams him into the side of the wall, and Izuku yelps, kicking and struggling. “You’re the one who did it, so don’t try playing innocent! You’re the one who stole my books!”

“I-I didn’t!” Izuku shrieks, kicking, thrashing. “I-I didn’t, Kacchan, you know I didn’t—!”

“How the hell am I supposed to know that!?” Katsuki slams him against the locker harder, nails digging into Izuku’s shoulders. “You’re the only person who would do it! You did it just to get me in trouble, didn’t you!? Some kind of stupid prank!?”

“I didn’t—!”

“Stop lying to me!”

Katsuki slams him harder. Izuku is crying, still kicking, still thrashing, but Katsuki pays him no mind.

“You’re the monster here, not me!” Katsuki shrieks at him, and he lies to himself. He’s always lied to himself. He’s told himself that it didn’t affect him, that he wasn’t afraid. “Stop playing the victim, you worthless—!”

Izuku's teeth sink into Katsuki's forearm, and Katsuki yowls in pain and springs backwards, clutching his wrist. Izuku sinks to the ground, palms splayed flat against the floor, tears splashing the ground below him.

And then, Izuku's head snaps up, and he scrambles to his feet, lunges, and tackles Katsuki to the ground.

They roll and tumble in a flurry of limbs for a good while, kicking and biting and punching.

"Let go of me, Deku—! I said let go*—! What's wrong with you!?" Katsuki reaches out, his fingers clasping Izuku's forearm. Sparks fly; Izuku shrieks, but doesn't let go, rolling over and pinning Katsuki beneath him.*

"I'm trying!" Izuku shrieks, tears streaming down his cheeks. A few of them drop and splash Katsuki's face. "I'm trying*, Kacchan, I-I'm trying! I-I didn't ask f-for—I-I didn't ask—!"*

Katsuki flings him off, and Izuku lets go with a cry, back slamming into the wall again. Katsuki scrambles to his feet, fingers smoking; Izuku clutches his arm, still sobbing.

Katsuki stares at him. Izuku stares at the ground.

Monsters shouldn't have feelings.

Sometimes Izuku wishes he doesn't have feelings. If he's really a monster, like Kacchan and everyone says he is, then…

…Why does it hurt so much?

"I heard little Izuku transferred schools," Katsuki's mom says idly over the dinner table. "Oy, Katsuki, you're friends with him, aren't you?"

"No," Katsuki says, "I'm not. I don't know what's wrong with him."

"Hm." Mom takes a drink, then sets her cup down again. "Maybe I'll give Inko-san a call a little later on, just to make sure everything's okay…"

Katsuki doesn't finish dinner.

He's a monster. That's what Izuku is. People who aren't monsters don't die *the way he dies. They don't drop dead and then pop back up again, "a-ok."*

He has to be some kind of a monster. Some kind of half-dead zombie, maybe. That's what he is.

That's what Katsuki believed.

Izuku is not in a good place, mentally, when he transfers schools. Mom knows that it had something to do with Kacchan; it can't exactly not *have something to do with him, considering the burn marks, but…she doesn't ask, and on Izuku's request, she doesn't tell the rest of the Bakugous.*

It isn't a day Izuku wants to remember. Ever. So he does his best to put it out of his memory.

"Everyone, this is Midoriya Izuku, your new classmate. Please treat him well."

They don't. They ignore Izuku for the duration of the first day; Izuku hears them whispering about him behind their backs, laughing, maybe even scheming, but he does his best to ignore it. He eats lunch alone, then heads back to the classroom.

The rest of the students are already there. Izuku makes sure his sleeve is pulled down over the bandages covering the burn marks, then takes his seat at the back of the class. The teacher is also there, writing something on the blackboard. Izuku sets his backpack on the floor, then grabs his books out of it and places them on the desk in front of him.

His hands are shaking, just a bit, and he has to remind himself that Kacchan isn't here, that he's okay, that he's fine, he doesn't have to be constantly looking over his shoulder anymore, he's okay—

There's a loud pop! *just by his ear, and he jumps, his knees slamming into the bottom of his desk. Around him, he hears his new classmates laughing and cackling; one of them, just behind Izuku, is holding an empty party-popper.*

It's a joke.

It's a prank.

But the pop reminds Izuku of exactly what he'd been trying to forget, and before he even realizes what's happening, he feels a twist and a yank, and his physical body smacks his desk, then slips out of the chair into a heap on the ground.

No one is laughing now. His classmates went from cackling to screaming *in no more than an instant, and then they're running around, screaming, crying; the teacher scrambles for his phone, dials a number.*

Izuku's spirit hovers over his desk, over his body. There's a large splatter of blood from where his skull connected with the desk, and on the floor, more blood pools beneath his head.

And people are screaming.

People are scared.

Of him. Of his power.

And he finds himself wondering again:

If he's really a monster, like Kacchan and his previous classmates claimed he was...then why does he hurt *so badly?*

Izuku has had it.

Without thinking, he runs towards Bakugou as All Might does the same. Just as All Might pulls back his fist and Bakugou's palms crackle and spark, Izuku kicks Bakugou in the back of the knees, forcing his legs to buckle. Bakugou hits the ground with another furious shout, and Izuku pulls back his fist and fires a blast in All Might's face.

All Might puts up his arms to shield himself, and Izuku immediately drops his ghost out of his body—it lands on Bakugou, fittingly—and phases through All Might as a spirit.

It isn't much, but it buys him time. He focuses on his hands, then yanks Bakugou out from underneath his body, makes sure he has a secure grip on his arms, and flies down the street in the opposite direction, dragging Bakugou with him.

Bakugou is *not* happy. "Let go of me, Deku!" he demands, thrashing and throwing punch after punch, all of which phase through Izuku harmlessly. "I said *let go of me!"*

"I won't!" Izuku snaps back at him, moving faster. "We have to pass this final, Bakugou, and facing All Might head on is *not* the way to do that!"

"I don't care what you have to say—!"

“Maybe you *should!”*

Bakugou doesn’t let up, throwing attack after attack, sparks flying from his hands. A part of Izuku wonders why All Might hasn’t caught up to them yet; and then it occurs to him that All Might knows just how bad their relationship is and could just be giving them a head start.

This is pathetic.

Izuku grits his teeth, coming closer and closer to the escape gate.

This is pathetic…

I know the teachers are going easy on us so we at least have a chance to win, but…All Might knows we can’t work together. And he’s letting us go.

He can see the escape gate from here; a cheesy looking billboard stretches overtop, with the words “ESCAPE GATE!” written in red, like it’s some kind of a carnival game, complete with a cut-out of Nedzu with a thumbs-up (a…a somethings-up?) and a smile.

It’s almost taunting, and Izuku moves faster, ignoring Bakugou’s shrieks of protest and the sparks flying from his palms.

All Might will catch up with us. He will. But…

…This is…

And then he feels something… *weird.*

It’s a yank and a tug, but it’s not like the kind he gets when something bad is about to happen. No, this feels…even stronger than that, like he’s on a tether and he just reached the end of it and is being yanked backwards.

What…?

He looks over his shoulder; he’s on the other side of the training city now, far, far away from his physical body.

…Wait, is there…?

…Some kind of a distance limit…?

“What are you doing!?” Bakugou demands furiously, thrashing again. “Why’d you stop!?”

“I don’t know,” Izuku says, trying to move forward again; he feels it again, that weird tug, and he can’t plunge ahead anymore, even though the escape gate is *tauntingly close.* “I can’t move, for some reason—”

The tug suddenly becomes more vicious, and Izuku barely has time to let Bakugou go before he’s pulled backwards by an invisible force.

Bakugou disappears from sight; he passes a red and blue blur that he knows is All Might, but he’s moving so fast that the world blurs around him.

And then his head snaps up, and he’s back in his physical body all the way on the other side of the training field.

He gets to his feet shakily and stumbles around for a moment or two, catching himself on the side of a damaged building. He doesn’t feel nauseous like he does when he overuses his Quirk, though he does feel lightheaded and dizzy. Maybe a little disoriented.

“Hey, kid, you alright?”

“That was so weird.”

“Has that ever happened before?”

“No,” Izuku answers, shaking his head to clear his vision and try and ward off some of the dizziness. “Never. I’ve never been that far away from my body before, s-so...I think it’s some kind of a distance limit, or something…”

“Hmm, yes, that seems like it would make the most sense.”

“Ya might wanna take a few minutes to catch your breath, though, before charging back into it—”

“I don’t have time for that,” Izuku says, already firing up Full Cowl and taking off down the road again, leaping over cracks in the asphalt from All Might’s first attack. “All Might went after us, which means he isn’t expecting me to show up with my actual body…”

I guess, in a way, I accidentally came up with a good strategy, he thinks, teeth gritted behind his lips. *A perfect surprise attack, showing up out of nowhere with my physical body and One For All.*

“As long as you’re careful,” says Nana, *“do whatever you want, kiddo. We*

won't stop you."

"Good luck to ya, buddy! I have faith in you!"

"Thanks," Izuku says, shaking his head to clear away some more fuzziness on the corners of his sight. "I just hope Bakugou did the smart thing and went for the escape gate. He definitely had enough time…"

ARE YOU FREAKING KIDDING ME—

Bakugou is fighting All Might. Or, he's trying to; it's mainly a never ending round of Bakugou running, trying to land an attack, and then getting *owned* when All Might either slams him into the ground or flings him into the side of a building.

For the longest of moments, Izuku can do nothing but stare in stunned shock.

And then the fury returns, and he runs.

"Bakugou!" he snaps, fists swinging back and forth at his sides. "You were *right there,* why didn't you just get to the gate—!"

"Shut up, Deku!" Bakugou demands, kicking off the ground and sprinting.

Like I wasn't expecting that response.

"Bakugou, *please!"* Izuku pleads with him this time, because there's nothing he can yell, nothing he can snap, nothing he can *say* that'll make Bakugou listen to him, so he goes to begging. "You're throwing away our chances to pass, and not just that, but you're risking our futures, and for what!? You have to—!"

"I don't have to do *anything!"*

Bakugou fires off a blast in All Might's face—a blast that, Izuku knows from past experiences, will do absolutely nothing to stop the hero.

Honestly, All Might can't take it seriously.

He tries to, he really does, but Bakugou's attacks are pathetic, and there's not much Midoriya can do when he's too busy trying to keep Bakugou from killing himself. So far, Midoriya's done the most

damage, blasting All Might with that attack, then phasing through him long enough to buy them an opening.

But since then, nothing outstanding has happened. …Actually, even Midoriya's attacks hadn't been *outstanding.*

All Might is still watching, but he isn't analyzing the situation like he would in an actual fight. No, right now, he's simply observing; watching Izuku scream at Bakugou, watching Bakugou shrug off his attempts at working together, defending and retaliating whenever Bakugou manages to get close enough to land a hit, not that his attacks do very much…

Their relationship is in pieces. Midoriya is trying to get along and come up with a solution, but Bakugou won't hear him.

Pitting the two of them against me for this final exam, even when the principal knew they'd do nothing but fight each other…was a mistake.

Bakugou runs at him again. Izuku isn't far behind, though he's pursuing Bakugou rather than All Might.

Well…

All Might takes in a breath and pulls back his fist.

…We may as well get this over with…

Izuku.

Has.

Had it.

He's so fed up he feels like he could *explode* with the intensity of it. He wants to scream and yank his hair and, moreover, he *really* wants to punch Bakugou in the face.

So, without thinking it through, that's exactly what he does.

He overcomes Bakugou with a quick activation of One For All, and then he drops his ghost from his body, focusing on his hand and leg. Teeth gritted, body slamming into the asphalt behind him, he slams his heel into Bakugou's face and his fist into All Might's.

It's one last ditch effort to pass this exam, and no matter how ditch of

an effort it is, Izuku isn't going to let it go.

Bakugou goes flying one way—back, towards the escape gate—and All Might's head snaps in one direction from the force of the hit.

After that, Izuku works in overdrive, body moving on instinct and fury alone.

He zips back into his physical body, grabs Bakugou's forearm with both hands, and leaps into the air with One For All burning through his veins.

Bakugou's face is bloody from a nosebleed, and he swings around blindly, squinting from the blood in his eyes (and he'll probably have black eyes after this, too).

"Get your hands OFF—!"

"Shut up, just, *shut up!"*

He can't take it anymore. He is *so sick* of being the victim, so sick of trying and trying and *hoping* that somehow, someday, Bakugou would drop his stubbornness, that Bakugou would drop his pride and actually *see* what he's done.

He's so tired.

He's so tired of trying, and he's been trying so hard for so long.

"If all you want to do is fight the people who are on your side, who want to stand *with* you—!"

He lets Bakugou go and pulls back his fist, eyes burning, teeth gritted, golden tendrils spreading through his skin.

"Then why are you even trying to become a hero!?"

He lets the punch fly and has just enough time to see the shock in Bakugou's eyes before the wind pressure blasts the two of them away from each other. Izuku goes flying one way, and Bakugou goes flying another—just as Izuku had intended the whole time.

Bakugou tries straightening himself out with a couple blasts, but it's too late; he tumbles through the escape gate.

Izuku's feet slam into the asphalt. His arm is throbbing—there's a chance he went over his limit slightly, with how much of One For All

he could use without breaking his limbs—but his arm definitely isn't *broken,* so he doesn't pay it much mind.

He hears a chipper voice call out "WIN!" as Bakugou gets to his feet outside of the gate. His back is to Izuku, and even though they're a considerable distance away from each other, Izuku can see Bakugou trembling.

Izuku is trembling, too, but for other reasons. He has no doubt Bakugou is angry, furious, even, but Izuku…

All he feels is this horrible sense of regret.

And realization.

"Young Midoriya…?"

All Might could have stopped them. He could've, he really could've; he could've thwarted Midoriya's attack, could've stopped him from blasting Bakugou to safety, could've stopped the fight before it even began.

But he hadn't. If it'd been any other two individuals fighting him—no, fighting *each other* —then All Might would have intervened. Just...not with these two individuals. Not in this kind of situation. Not when Midoriya's voice carried such a deep sense of hurt and pain.

All Might takes in a breath. Midoriya's back is to him, and for the longest moment, neither of them say anything.

And then, just as All Might inhales to speak,

"All Might...this is how it's always going to be, isn't it?" Midoriya says, voice small, but somehow very sure of itself. "Between me and Bakugou."

All Might stops approaching, but says nothing.

"...It's always going to be this way, isn't it?" Midoriya goes on, and although he says the words with absolute certainty, his voice cracks, and All Might doesn't miss it. "Even though I try to make it better, even when I try to get along with him...it's not going to change, right? He's going to hate me no matter what I do, and I...I'm going to hate him."

All Might wants to say something now, but he can't think of the

words. So he refrains.

"...I don't...I-I don't *want* to hate him," Midoriya rambles on, and his hands run through his hair for a moment or two. "I don't *want* to hate him. I want to get along, I want to be friends, I-I—I just want to be able to be in the same room with him without...without wanting to run away, a-and without him blowing up in my face. H-How...how do I do that, All Might?"

A beat.

"What am I doing *wrong?"*

And All Might is stumbling for something to say. He takes in a long breath, then approaches again, finally moving to stand alongside his student rather than behind him. He looks at Midoriya's face; Midoriya doesn't look back at him, and although he's still, although he looks scarily *calm,* there are tears rolling down his cheeks.

"...Kiddo...you're doing everything you can," All Might says, picking his words carefully. "Believe me, I know you. None of what happened today...none of what happened *before...* was your fault."

Midoriya makes no move to show that he's heard.

"Building trust," All Might goes on slowly, "friendship, even *acquaintanceships* with people, especially people you have a bad history with, takes years of work on both parts. Otherwise...it never happens. You're trying your best, and I don't think you should stop, but, Midoriya...from this point on, whether or not your relationship improves...is far more on Bakugou than it is on you."

Midoriya sucks in a sharp breath, but the tears don't *really* start to fall until All Might settles an arm around his shoulders.

Shouto has known since day one that Midoriya and Bakugou's relationship was in pieces, shattered worse than glass, although he's never known their history or what the reason behind it is.

Which is why, as soon as Midoriya and Bakugou's final exam is over (they passed, but at what cost is the question), Shouto goes with Kirishima, Iida, and Uraraka to Recovery Girl's infirmary to check on their friend.

Bakugou isn't there when the four of them burst in. Midoriya is,

though, and so are Howler and Recovery Girl; Recovery Girl is writing something down at a table, barely raising her head to see the new arrivals. She must've been expecting them.

Midoriya is sitting on the edge of the infirmary bed, head down, and Howler is splayed across his lap, which immediately sends off red flags through Shouto's head (and a quick glance at the others around him tell him they're thinking the same thing). Howler has always had a knack for knowing exactly when people need comforting, and this situation is no exception.

It's Kirishima who breaks the ice when no one else dares to. "So, uh, where's Bakugou?"

Shouto *almost* elbows him. He knows Kirishima is asking it just for the sake of saying something, but *really,* Bakugou? Asking about Bakugou after the fight they'd just watched?

"He left," is all Midoriya says, without raising his head. "Recovery Girl fixed his nose, and he stormed off."

Shouto hadn't been expecting anything different from Bakugou, and judging by Iida, Uraraka, and Kirishima's crestfallen looks, they hadn't expected anything different, either.

There's...a lot Shouto doesn't know, about Midoriya. There's a lot he doesn't know about Bakugou. But, in today's final, watching them fight...it was obvious which of the two didn't want to get along.

And it wasn't Midoriya.

"...Hey, um, buddy."

It's Kirishima who speaks again, crossing the room and, after a bit of awkward hesitation, sinks down onto the edge of the bed beside Midoriya.

"...The weekend starts tomorrow," Kirishima says idly, trying to sound lighthearted, and Shouto supposes this is Kirishima's way of comforting people: lightening the mood. "...Do you, I mean...do you wanna go get coffee or something? There's a pretty sick mall downtown, and I've always wanted to go, so, I thought, y'know…"

There's a long moment in which nothing happens.

And then, Midoriya nods shakily, and Shouto isn't sure, but he thinks

he sees something roll down his friend's face and drip onto Howler's fur.

"...Thanks," Midoriya says, nodding, and when his voice cracks, Shouto and the others pretend they don't noticed. "I-I'd...I'd like that."

[Unknown]
Yo, Midoriya! This is Tensei. Tenya gave me your number, said I should send you a couple of jokes, which is weird because he generally doesn't encourage them. Wanna hear one or two?

[Izuku]
Sure.

[Unknown]
Okay. So. I wanted to tell you about this documentary I watched, and it was all about beavers.

[Izuku]
Okay

[Unknown]
It was the best dam show I ever saw!
:D

[Izuku]
ayyy

[Unknown]
Ayyyy.
Anyway, I hope you're alright. Tenya seemed pretty worried about you earlier when he came home. Jokes aside, are you okay?

[Izuku]
Yeah, I'm fine. Rough day at school is all.
Thanks for the jokes. Feel free to send them anytime.

[Unknown]
You betcha! And same goes for you.
Sleep well! I hope tomorrow's a better day.

[Izuku]
Thanks, Tensei. Me too.

Chapter End Notes

Continuing on, peeps! I don't have much to say this time around, other than that I'm recovering from a semi-major oral surgery and kinda not feeling myself. Special thanks to my beta-reader for putting up with my post-surgery typos and whatnot. Love ya dude.

And a special thanks to all you readers who brighten my day with your encouraging words!! Thank you all so much for everything! Until next time, go beyond! PLUS ULTRA!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Another Terrible Day

Chapter Summary

"Another Terrible Day" from The Lightning Thief: The Percy Jackson Musical

"Just another terrible day / Where everything's the worst."

Chapter Notes

Quick warning before we get into this: this chapter contains some spoilers for the most recent episode of the anime and the corresponding manga chapters, so if you're not caught up with either, you might wanna do so before checking this out!!

Also, art!!! :D

its_octopuses 2 3
chiangyorange
exhausted-aizawa
camiichu

Thank you all so much!! Enjoy the chapter! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The scar on his face has always looked more prominent on his spirit than on his physical body.

And it's a bit odd, because the scar on his face is *always* very prominent, prominent enough for him to be asked about it on a regular basis, prominent enough for Toshinori to bring it up while they trained on Dagobah, prominent enough for Tensei to comment on it…and it's even *more* prominent when he's a spirit.

But Izuku has never given it much thought. The day he got the scar is...not a day he likes remembering. The scar is always a reminder, but when people ask about it, he tries to laugh it off, tries to convince himself that it's not a big deal, that it's just a scar, that it doesn't bother him.

Except he's looking at it now, as a spirit in front of the mirror, and he thinks it stands out more starkly than ever before.

His ghost-self has always had scars—or, not *always,* but, ever since he was, say, five or six years old, a little while after his Quirk developed. He has smaller ones on his face, some more obvious than others, and his forearms are matted with them. Some of them almost look like burns.

He takes in a breath through his nose, then lets it out, looking at the scar splitting across his face once more. The scar is almost illuminated, white against his otherwise green outline, and he swallows thickly, raising a translucent finger to trace over it like he's done so many times.

There's also the recent development of the flecks of white in his hair that hadn't been there before, which are also much more prominent on his spirit-self. And in the back of his mind he's thinking about Yukō, the next ex-holder in line, and he's wondering how he died, how gruesome his death was, what it's going to feel like when he experiences it for himself—

"Kiddo?"

"Ya doin' okay, boyo?"

"Yeah, I'm fine," Izuku says, lowering his hand and shaking his head. He's been thinking about this too long, and his head is starting to hurt again. "Just, y'know...got a lot of stuff on my mind, I guess."

"Hmm." Kibō hums thoughtfully while Izuku clicks off the bathroom light and heads back into his room. Howler perks up at once, and Izuku slips back into his body and stares up at his ceiling, scratching Howler's ears when the dog presses his nose against his cheek.

"Well, you've got the weekend coming up," Aki says, *"so at least you've got that. Plus, that summer training camp in the woods! That's something to look forward to, isn't it?"*

"And your buddies are taking you out for coffee sometime soon!" Senshi says enthusiastically. *"That'll be fun, won't it? Just hanging out with them and not having to worry about Bad-Tempered McSplody?"*

Yeah, that'll be nice. They still have to plan a day for that, but until then, just the knowledge that there *will* be such a day is comforting.

On the contrary to what Aizawa had solemnly declared before, everyone—regardless of whether they'd passed or flunked the finals—

is allowed to go to the forest training camp.

It isn't what Izuku or anyone else had been expecting to hear when Aizawa faced the class the following morning; Kaminari and Ashido had been especially upset ever since Izuku arrived, spent the whole morning draped over desks and moaning about how devastated they were that they were going to miss the training camp.

And then, according to Aizawa, they were all going after all, and honestly, Izuku wasn't *that* surprised by the revelation. After all, those who failed the exams needed the most training, and what better training than this upcoming summer camp?

"I'll be handing out pamphlets," Aizawa says, stepping out from behind his desk and making his way into the classroom with a stack of papers. "There's a list of things you need here. The trip is still another two weeks off, so you'll have time to get whatever you don't have, but please don't wait until the last second."

And, once all the pamphlets are handed out, Aizawa dismisses homeroom and heads out, leaving the students behind.

"Oh, man, I don't have *anything,"* Kaminari laments, holding the pamphlet at arm's length with one hand, the other hand running through his hair. "I'm gonna have to do a *crap* ton of shopping before camp if I wanna grab everything I need…"

"Hey, I know!" says Hagakure, bouncing up to them. "There's a mall downtown, we could all go there together to get everything for training camp!"

"That's an idea!" Kirishima says, snapping his fingers. "We were talking about going out for coffee sometime, anyway, right, Midoriya?"

Izuku nods. He feels better today than he did the day of the finals; plus, Bakugou hasn't said a word to him since then, which is another huge, *huge* bonus.

Actually...he hasn't seen Bakugou at all today. He thinks he remembers seeing him in the locker room briefly, on his way to Class 1-A, but he's pretty sure his general lack of presence kicked in to save his butt, because Bakugou didn't so much as glance in his direction.

On one hand, it's nice.

On the other hand, it's worrying.

"What about this Saturday?" Jirou asks, perched on the edge of the desk and fiddling with an earphone jack. "It's probably better to do it sooner than later, so we can make a quick run back if we forget something."

"Ooh, that sounds great!" Sero chimes in. "We can all go together, too, so we can have a fun little 'class-outing' before our training from hell!"

It sounds like a good idea, and the rest of their classmates are quick to agree to it. They decide to head out together early Saturday morning, before the lunch rush, in hopes of not getting caught when the mall is at its busiest.

"What about you, Thermostat?" Izuku asks, as Todoroki gets to his feet and slings his bag around his shoulder. "You in or nah?"

"It sounds like fun," Todoroki answers, "but I visit my mom on Saturday mornings. Maybe we can go out later on today, if you want."

"Hey, that works," Izuku says, nodding. "I'll text you once we're done at the mall and we'll plan a time, or something. Tell your mom I said hi."

"I will."

The door of Class 1-A slides open again, and Aizawa pokes his head in and meets Izuku's eyes.

"Also, Midoriya," he says, like an afterthought, "I'd like to speak with you after lunch. Meet me in the principal's office, if you would."

"O-Oh, sure," Izuku says, blinking, and Aizawa retreats from the room and shuts the door behind him.

"...Oh boy," Kirishima says, turning from the closed door to Izuku. "What'd you do this time?"

"I have no idea," Izuku answers, slinging his backpack over his shoulder. "Guess I'll find out soon enough, though, right?"

After lunch, he finds himself standing in the principal's office before Nedzu's desk. Aizawa is leaning against the wall off to the side, arms crossed over his chest, and Izuku doesn't fail to notice how Howler sits

a bit straighter at his side, on alert.

Izuku lifts his head. His bell jingles a little bit, and the sound is almost comforting. “What’s wrong?” he asks.

Nedzu doesn’t answer directly. “Please, have a seat, Midoriya-kun,” he says, gesturing to a stool a little further ahead, and Izuku advances and sits down. Izuku swallows thickly, clenching and unclenching his fists.

“...Did...Did I do something wrong?” Izuku asks when the silence stretches.

“No, you didn’t,” Nedzu says, straightening up. “Actually, I called you here because I wanted to apologize.”

Izuku blinks. “Apologize...?”

Nedzu nods. “We pitted you with Bakugou for the final exams,” he says, “because we thought it would help mend your relationship with Bakugou, which was wrong of us to assume. We made it your responsibility to fix things between you and Bakugou, and that wasn’t right.”

“We’re the teachers here,” Aizawa says, straightening up and uncrossing his arms, “not you. Forcing you to have your practical final exam with someone we knew you didn’t have a good relationship with was wrong.”

“We also wanted to congratulate you on completing the exam regardless,” Nedzu goes on, “and assure you that none of what happened between you and Bakugou during the exam was your fault, and that we will take responsibility of Bakugou from this point forward and not force you into a situation like that again.”

Izuku sinks his teeth into his lower lip, not hard enough to draw blood, but hard enough to bring pain.

“What’s...what’s going to happen to Bakugou?” he asks after another moment, raising his head.

Nedzu and Aizawa exchange glances.

“He’ll still be going with us to the training camp,” Aizawa answers at long last, looking at Izuku, “but depending on how that goes, he may or may not be continuing school here at U.A.”

Izuku doesn't know how to feel about that.

Class 1-A, with the obvious exceptions of Bakugou and Todoroki, take the train downtown to the Kiyoshi Ward shopping mall. It's *enormous,* and even though it's still reasonably early in the day (barely ten), the mall is bustling with people. Kids skip alongside their parents; a few passing couples walk hand-in-hand; all around them is laughter and chatter, echoing throughout the area.

"Wow, it's even bigger than I imagined!" Ashido says, racing forward and spinning around excitedly, taking in everything. "I don't even know where to start!"

"We could split off into separate groups depending on what we're looking for," Yaoyorozu offers, stepping forward then turning to face the group. "That way we can all find exactly what we need within a reasonable amount of time."

"That's an idea!" says Kaminari, snapping his fingers. "I need a suitcase, who else?"

"I'm looking for a handbag," Tsuyu says, raising a hand, "so there's a chance we could find both those in the same store."

"I need a handbag as well," says Yaoyorozu, nodding. "So the two of you, along with anyone else who needs the likes, come along with me. I'll also be stopping for some indoor shoes…"

"Me!" Ashido says, thrusting her hand above her head. "I need some indoor shoes, too!"

"So, Midoriya," Kirishima says, turning to him and pulling his bag further over his shoulder, "what are you here for?"

"Oh, I'm looking for a new collar for Howler," Izuku says; Howler perks up at the sound of his name, tongue lolling out of his mouth. "His old one keeps coming unlatched for some reason."

"Yeah, I'm looking for ankle weights, so I'll be checking out some of the sports shops," Kirishima says, jabbing his thumb over his shoulder at nothing. "I don't think any of us need pet supplies, though, so you might be on your own there."

"Rip," choruses at *least* three of the voices in his head.

“Except,” Kirishima goes on, holding his chin in his hand, “I’m pretty sure there’s a pet shop not far from an athletic place, so we could go together, y’know.”

Izuku nods. “Sounds great.”

This goes on for quite some time, people splitting off into sub-groups to gather different things, and the groups break off eventually, each to their own. Izuku and Kirishima head downtown for the pet supply shop while the others go with their groups, further into the vast mall.

“So, ankle weights?” Izuku asks after a little while of walking.

Kirishima nods. “Yeah, ankle weights,” he answers. “And I’m sure there’s other stuff I need, too, but I can’t think of anything else right now. Are you looking for a harness for Howler or just a normal collar?”

“Something that’ll last throughout the summer camp,” Izuku answers, “so, just a sturdy dog collar—”

He’s almost physically slammed into by something, except it isn’t a physical thing, and he knows this the moment he feels this. It’s a yank at his chest, like something’s pulling him in the other direction, and he’s felt it enough times to know exactly what it means.

“Yo, Midoriya?” Kirishima stops a couple steps ahead of Izuku, looking back. “What’s up?”

Izuku doesn’t answer right away, rather raising his head, eyes scanning the crowds. Howler has noticed his fear and is on alert, too, ears twitching, and Izuku searches through the crowds of people, watching, seeking, right up until—

“Kirishima, call the police.”

Kirishima stares at him. “Buddy?”

“Call the police.” Izuku swallows hard, and his tongue feels too thick for his mouth. “Shigaraki is here.”

“Shigaraki!?”

“Shh!” Izuku *almost* slaps his hand over Kirishima’s mouth, though he refrains. “He’s here,” Izuku repeats, quieter, once Kirishima calms down. “He’s wearing a hood, but it’s definitely him.”

“The hell?” Kirishima questions in a harsh whisper, raising his head as high as he can and searching the heads of people bustling to and fro. “I can’t see him, where?”

“He’s making his way further into the mall,” Izuku answers, the yank still a very real feeling in his chest. “...Kirishima, just, get on the phone with the police. I’m going to follow him.”

“What?” Kirishima’s voice is a harsher whisper now, but instead of looking at the crowds, his head snaps around towards Izuku. “Midoriya, are you *kidding—”*

“Don’t worry,” Izuku says shortly, and he reaches behind him and unclips his bell choker, then holds it out to Kirishima. “He won’t even know I’m there. Just hold onto this for a second.”

“Dude, are you *insa—”*

“If I can stay on Shigaraki’s tail until the police get here, there’s a chance they’ll be able to take him into custody,” Izuku cuts in, and when he thinks about it, he lowers his hand (still holding the bell choker) and unfastens his medical bracelet from his wrist without turning it off. The red light immediately starts blinking, distressed not to find a pulse, and Izuku hands this and his bell out to Kirishima. “I won’t do anything stupid, I promise.”

Kirishima doesn’t seem convinced, but he takes both the choker and the bracelet from Izuku’s hand.

“I’m guessing Recovery Girl will dispatch an ambulance here, maybe, when she gets the reading from the bracelet,” Izuku says, “but get on the phone with the police, tell them what’s going on.”

“I swear, Midoriya, if you do something stupid and wind up getting hurt—”

“I won’t.”

Shigaraki is still moving through the crowds, hands stuffed in the pockets of a black sweatshirt. He hasn’t seen Izuku yet, or any of Izuku’s classmates by the looks of it; he’s walking, slowly but deliberately, and the yank in Izuku’s chest is almost too much to bear.

“I’ll be right back,” Izuku says, already taking a few steps backwards in that direction. “I won’t do anything reckless, I promise.”

Kirishima bites his lip, but nods. “Whatever you say, dude,” he says, whipping his phone out of his pocket and dialing. While holding it to his ear, he adds, “You’d better keep that promise, though.”

“I will,” Izuku says, and he spins on his heel and races into the crowd with Howler, the sound of his panicking medical bracelet fading from his ears as he advances.

He has to duck out of the way of people’s arms when they gesture, and since no one avoids him he’s left avoiding them on his own, swerving out of their ways while still trying (and succeeding) to keep Shigaraki in his sights. He doesn’t think about Kirishima anymore, confident that his friend is in touch with the police and that they’ll be here soon.

For now, though, Izuku is left to tail Shigaraki, and to be fair, it isn’t the *stupidest* thing he’s done, so he gives himself a pass, here.

He catches up in little to no time, but leaves a five-foot blanket of distance between him and Shigaraki. Howler moves slowly, almost stealthily, and Izuku keeps his steps light, although he knows Shigaraki can’t hear him over the din created by the crowd.

Izuku presses closer, squeezing between two people who don’t even notice him. The ache and pull in his chest is still there, and it seems stronger than ever, though he tries not to let it get to him.

“Damn, what a coincidence.”

“I wonder what he wants…”

“If it comes down to it, sweetheart, remember what that Gran Torino fellow told you.”

“That’s right. And remember what the police told you about the Hero Killer and Quirk-sustained injuries.”

“Endeavor took credit for it last time, but…”

“Yeah, there’re a lot of witnesses here…”

Izuku doesn’t answer. He tunes out their voices, but even so, he knows they have a point. Except, if it *does* come down to it and he doesn’t have any other choice, if he has to choose between the law and saving these civilians from Shigaraki, should the villain try anything…

...Well…

The answer is obvious.

He realizes a second later that, even though the rest of the ex-holders are commenting and giving him suggestions (one of them even points out where Shigaraki is when Izuku loses sight of him for a moment), Nana hasn't said a single thing.

"What's with society, huh?"

The ex-holders go silent and Izuku presses forward. Shigaraki's voice is low, nearly impossible to hear over the rest of the hustle and bustle, but Izuku can still make it out clearly.

"Society...heroes, villains...people…"

He's talking to himself, Izuku thinks, biting his lip. He moves closer, but not too close; just close enough to be able to still hear him, though far enough as to not be seen.

"The League of Villains...the Hero Killer…"

Izuku frowns. *They aren't working together?*

I guess that makes sense...the Hero Killer has his own little creed going, so I don't think he'd side with villains whose only goal is to 'destroy what they don't like'...

"They think they're so safe in this society," Shigaraki says lowly, walking along. "They think they're protected by the heroes...they think no one would dare to disturb that...they've brainwashed themselves."

"What is he going on about?"

"Shh," Izuku says, advancing. He notices a change in Shigaraki's pace; slowly, more leisurely. Izuku adjusts his own pace accordingly.

"...I wonder…"

Shigaraki passes a family. There's a little boy, beaming and holding his mother's hand.

In that moment, the rest of the world blurs. Izuku sees Shigaraki move his arm, slowly, very slowly, dragging his hand from his pocket, and Izuku's ears ring until he can't hear the crowds anymore.

No.

“Tenko, don’t—!”

Nana’s shrill voice snaps Izuku out of his daze.

“Yo, Handy-Man.”

Shigaraki’s arm goes still, and his feet stop moving. Izuku does the same, stopping, watching, waiting, taking in the situation.

Shigaraki whips his head around. His eyes, crimson red and generally full of anger and spite (or covered with one of those gross, detached hands), are now filled with fear.

And then he’s moving again.

His hand snakes out, and his fingers curl around the little boy’s wrist. Izuku surges forward, but it’s already too late; the boy is yanked away from his mother, and Shigaraki wraps an arm around the boy’s stomach and keeps his other hand by the boy’s throat.

“Don’t come any closer!” Shigaraki hisses; the crowds have stopped doing what they were doing now, either turning to face the scene or running in the opposite direction with their kids. “I’m warning you, take one step towards me and I’ll kill him!”

“Okay, okay, I won’t!” Izuku says immediately, putting out his hands. “I won’t!” *Dammit, that was counterproductive.* “Just, calm down, there’s no reason to get the civilians involved, let him go—”

“Stay back!” Shigaraki demands, and he settles two fingers on the boy’s throat. In the crowd, the boy’s mother screams, and the boy himself has tears running down his face. “I’ll kill him, don’t try me!”

“I won’t come closer, just calm down!” Izuku says, which he’s sure is equally counterproductive. He locks eyes with the kid, smiles in a way he hopes doesn’t look like a grimace, and says, “It’s going to be okay, alright? Just—keep your eyes on my dog, okay? Focus on my dog, not the bad guy.”

The boy blinks, and more tears run down his face, but he nods shakily and shifts his gaze to Howler. Howler has been snarling and growling at Shigaraki for the past minute now, but as soon as the boy looks at him, Howler drops his aggressiveness and tilts his head to one side.

Okay, Izuku tells himself, taking in a breath, *okay, okay, diffuse the situation without stirring the embers…*

"Listen, if you wanna talk, then let's talk," Izuku says, putting out his hands slowly, like he's talking to a predatory animal about to strike him dead, "but let the kid go. He's done nothing to you, and this has nothing to do with him."

Shigaraki takes a single step backwards, though he seems to only hold the kid tighter. The boy squirms again, but stills the moment Shigaraki's third finger rests on his throat.

"This has *everything* to do with the public." Shigaraki's voice cracks several times with an emotion that Izuku can't put his finger on. "It always has…"

A fourth finger.

"And it always will."

"But why are you even here!?" Izuku questions, because if there's one thing he's gotten good at over the years, it's stalling. "Was your goal really just to come out here and nab some innocent kid? Really? What's the point of *that!?"*

"My goal is to tear down this superhuman society!" Shigaraki says loudly, and by the strangled sound the boy makes, Shigaraki's grip is becoming tighter. "I'll destroy heroes and what they stand for, *everything, all* of it! The things they cherish, the things they hold near —!"

"Sounds like a beat without a melody to me!" Izuku snaps at him. "Or, maybe a better way of putting it would be a melody without a beat. You want to destroy what you hate but why are you fighting? We've been over this before, are you really gonna make me repeat myself?"

"The *Hero Killer* —"

"The Hero Killer actually *stands* for something," Izuku cuts in. "The reason so many people respect him is because there's something there *to* respect."

He's rambling now; he isn't sure how much the crowds are paying attention to, how much sense he's making. Everyone seems to be in too much shock to move, forming something of a circle around Izuku, Shigaraki, and the villain's hostage.

“You don’t *have that,”* Izuku says, and he’s looking for an opening now, because Shigaraki is listening and any moment now he’ll have his opening. He just has to wait for it. “You don’t *have* a reason for people to respect you, even as a villain. People can’t take you seriously, so maybe you should leave them out of it until you solve your own problems first.”

And then, he sees it. A moment when Shigaraki lifts his head, a moment when his grip loosens around the kid’s throat, a moment when he’s not focused on Izuku, but rather, on Izuku’s words as they linger in the air.

Izuku seizes the moment, fires up One For All, and leaps.

Shigaraki notices his sudden movement, but by then it’s too late. At the last second, Izuku drops One For All, calling to mind the police’s words about Quirk-sustained injuries. He lets Gran Torino’s training take over, and he slams his heel into Shigaraki’s calf.

Shigaraki lets go of the boy immediately with a choked shout of pain, and Izuku, without thinking, grabs the kid by the arm and practically hurls him into the crowd. The kid trips and stumbles and is caught by a middle-aged woman who lurched forward when she saw him coming, and as soon as he’s out of the way, Izuku turns back to Shigaraki.

—Just in time to get tackled to the ground.

And then it’s a flurry of limbs and kicks and swings, and Izuku doesn’t know how he does it but he curls his fingers around Shigaraki’s wrists and doesn’t let go.

Shigaraki is on top of him, pinning him to the ground; the civilians have scattered, and everyone is shouting at once (a couple of them cheer Izuku on, as do the voices in his head), and Izuku grits his teeth. Shigaraki’s jerking and wrenching his wrists, trying to free himself, and Izuku’s palms are sweaty. He doesn’t know how much longer he can hold him back.

Crap, crap, crap!

Howler barrels in out of nowhere and sinks his teeth into Shigaraki’s forearm.

Shigaraki *shrieks,* releasing Izuku and raising his hand towards Howler instead. Izuku takes his moment, pulls his knee to his chest, and slams

his foot into Shigaraki's stomach. Howler lets go; Shigaraki stumbles back; Izuku grabs him by the arm, twists, and pins Shigaraki face-down on the ground.

For a long moment, he breathes. Howler growls and snarls off to the side, and the crowd of onlookers presses forward, concerned but relieved at the same time. The voices in Izuku's head are cheering, and Izuku tightens his grip on Shigaraki's hands and twists them further behind his back.

"...You know something...I was scared of you before, Midoriya, but…"

Izuku's eyes widen. Around Shigaraki, on the ground, he sees the first tell-tale signs of purple and black, swirling and creating a thin circle around them.

"...Now I think I realize…"

Shigaraki turns his head, and he and Izuku meet eyes. The black—Kurogiri's warp gate—spreads and comes closer, until it reaches Shigaraki's shoulders.

"...You're still just a flesh and blood person, just like anybody else. Even though you summon spirits...even though you killed a Nomu...in the end..."

"Midoriya, let go!"

Shigaraki's eyes are wide, bloodshot, and crazed.

"...You're still a human being who can be crushed."

"Midoriya!"

Something slams into him, knocking the breath out of his lungs, and knocking his *physical* body out of the circle. Izuku lifts his head off the ground, coughing and panting, and Kurogiri's warp gate swallows Shigaraki, then spirals to a close and vanishes.

Gone.

"Midoriya."

Izuku's head snaps up; Kirishima is on the ground a little ways away from him, propping himself up on one elbow, eyes wide and full of horror.

“You weren’t gonna let go,” he whispers.

The police show up before Izuku has a chance to come up with an answer.

“Midoriya!”

“Deku!”

“What happened!?”

The mall is closed while the police launch their investigation; Izuku meets up with the rest of his classmates on the outskirts of the mall after getting a quick check-over by the paramedics.

“I’m fine,” Izuku assures Iida, the first of his frantic friends to reach him. “I didn’t get hurt, just…”

Kirishima gives Izuku this *look,* but says nothing. It’s a good thing; honestly, Izuku doesn’t know how Iida would react, if he heard what Izuku had done.

What haunts Izuku right now is the fact that he *hadn’t* been planning to let go. He didn’t know what he was thinking, wasn’t aware of his own thought process—hell, he probably didn’t even *have* one—but he just…

“Midoriya-kun!”

Izuku raises his head; Naomasa waves him down.

“Mm, I see,” Naomasa says, tapping the eraser of his pencil against his temple. “So Shigaraki and the Hero Killer aren’t actually working together.”

Izuku swallows hard. He’s at the police station answering questions and recounting the incident to Naomasa, who’s taking notes as they go along.

“I’m sorry,” Izuku blurts; Howler’s head is a comforting weight against his leg, but Izuku ignores him entirely. “I—I had Shigaraki right there, and—and I let him go.”

“No, don’t be sorry.” Naomasa rises to his feet, settles his hand on Izuku’s shoulder, and Izuku raises his head to meet the detective’s

gaze. “It’s a good thing you did. I know you wanted to stop him, but your safety takes first priority.”

Izuku doesn’t want to think about it, but still; just, having Shigaraki right there, hands pinned behind his back. A couple more seconds and the police would’ve arrived. A couple more seconds and they would’ve had Shigaraki in custody.

“Thank you for your time, Midoriya,” Naomasa says, and numbly, Izuku pushes himself to his feet, too.

“It’s fine,” Izuku says, reaching up and touching the bell around his neck. Old habits die hard. “I’m sorry there wasn’t more I could do.”

“You saved that boy’s life,” Naomasa says, smiling at him. “As far as I’m concerned, you did the most important thing you could’ve done in that situation. I know it’s hard, but try not to beat yourself up over it, alright?”

Izuku bites his lip, but nods, though he doesn’t mean it.

“Your mother will be here soon,” Naomasa says, and when he starts walking, Izuku follows him, and Howler likewise. “We’ll be escorting the two of you home.”

Izuku nods; Naomasa opens the back door leading out of the station, and Izuku and Howler step outside with him. It’s dark now; the air is cold and crisp, and stars gimmer and twinkle above them.

“Tsukauchi, Izuku!”

Izuku and Naomasa turn; Toshinori hastens up to them, looking like he’d run the whole distance.

“Toshinori-san,” Izuku says, jogging to meet him halfway. As soon as he’s within arms reach, Toshinori grabs him by the shoulders and looks him in the eye.

“Are you alright?” he asks immediately, tone urgent. “Are you hurt? Recovery Girl said she dispatched an ambulance—”

“Nono, I’m fine, I promise,” Izuku says; Toshinori releases him a second later, though Izuku can still feel the worry rolling off him in waves. “I took off my medical bracelet for a while, that’s all. I’m fine.”

Toshinori breathes a long sigh of relief, shoulders slumping. “Thank

goodness," he says, and a second later, he reaches out and ruffles Izuku's hair. "You really had me worried there."

"Oh that's a mood."

"Seriously, that tousle was crazy."

"YOU DID GOOD, KID! BUT MAYBE LIGHTEN UP ON THE CRAZY A LITTLE NEXT TIME!"

Still no word from Nana.

Izuku swallows hard. He remembers a name, *Tenko,* that Nana had shouted when Shigaraki reached towards the boy, but...that hardly means anything. "Tenko," Tenko *who?* And why was Nana addressing *Shigaraki…?*

Mom gets there shortly thereafter. She's worried—of course she is—but it's projected in a more stern kind of manner, which is fine. Izuku deserves it.

The police escort them home in one of their vehicles. Izuku spends the duration of it leaning against the window, watching the city pass by through the barred windows of the police car.

When he has the chance to think of it, now, after the heat of the moment passed...that look on Shigaraki's face, when Izuku was rambling at him…

It was almost like *realization.*

Izuku swallows hard, then shuts his eyes. He really has way too much to think about...

"Nana. Who's Tenko?"

The silence almost hurts his head, actually, because he hadn't been expecting complete, total silence like this. Not even the more flamboyant ex-holders like Senshi and Dai have anything to say—that, or they don't *want* to say anything.

"...Kiddo, I don't…"

"You called Shigaraki 'Tenko,'" Izuku cuts in when Nana finally speaks. He left the lights in his room off, and Howler is sitting on the bed with his body while Izuku, as a spirit, stands in the middle of the

room. “Do you know him? And how?”

“…Listen, kid, I…”

“He wants me dead,” Izuku interrupts again, sharper this time, leaving less room for argument. “I think I have the right to know, don’t you?”

There’s more silence, for a time.

“…This isn’t something I want to talk about as just, a voice in your head,” Nana says quietly.

“Then we won’t,” Izuku says, and a second later, Nana materializes into the room. The last time he’d summoned her—or, rather, the *only* other time he’s summoned her—the magenta-colored outline of her spirit was bright and vibrant.

But now, like Dai’s had been, it’s softer, more melancholy.

Nana looks around for a moment, startled, obviously not expecting Izuku to summon her just like that, but a second later, her eyes find Izuku’s, and she holds his gaze.

“…Tenko,” Nana says slowly. “Shimura Tenko. He’s…” She stops for a moment, takes in a shuddering breath. “He’s my grandson.”

Things click, and Izuku wishes he could tear them apart again.

“…You…”

“…My husband was murdered by villains,” Nana says quietly, “so, I—I gave up our child because I was scared of him befalling the same fate. But…in the end, Tenko, his son…”

It’s…

…It’s a lot to take in.

“…Toshinori-san,” Izuku says, when he thinks about it. “Does…does he know?”

The silence is answer enough.

“I never got the chance to tell him,” Nana says, “and…when I was alive, I…I didn’t know what had become of my son, let alone my grandchild. And now, I…”

It really, *really is* a lot to take in.

“And I don’t know if I was *right* to give him up,” Nana says, gesturing at nothing with her hands, “or if I should’ve held onto my son and protected him, but then, I don’t know if I would’ve been able to protect him. There were a lot of people I tried and failed to protect, when I was alive.”

Izuku is called back to when he’d seen Nana’s death in his dreams. It wasn’t nearly as gruesome as Dai’s death—the final, burning flash he’d felt was quick and ended in an instant, while Dai’s final moments dragged on, and on, and on—but still, Nana’s death was…

Bile burns his throat, so he puts it out of his mind.

“I know you didn’t want to hurt your son,” Izuku says, when he finds his voice, “and I know you protected everyone you could, back then. I know you did what you thought was best to protect your son, your family.”

“But it didn’t work, did it?” Nana says, and she’s smiling, and it *burns.* “None of it worked. I couldn’t protect everyone, I couldn’t *save* everyone—”

“I don’t think that’s the point,” Izuku says, and he thinks of that boy and Shigaraki, and he thinks of the USJ, and he thinks of Dai. “You can’t save everyone, you just…you *can’t.* We’re human, all of us, it’s not…we’re not gods, we can’t save everyone. But…I think what really matters is that we try.”

Watching Dai—and not just him, but the rest of the ex-holders, too—watching them fight All For One had taught Izuku this much.

Nana lets out a long sigh. “You’re right,” she says, shaking her head, “you’re right, I just…”

Izuku doesn’t know what else to say—but he does have *one* thing, one thing he’s always been good at.

Whiplash.

[MIDORIYA IZUKU - VIDEO CALL - ACCEPT / DECLINE]

Toshinori is walking home himself from the police office, nearly at his apartment, when his phone rings. It isn’t often for Izuku to call him,

much less video call him, and when he thinks back to what Izuku told him, about seeing the ex-holders deaths in his dreams, he answers the call immediately.

He's expecting a lot of things—maybe tears, maybe a broken voice, like before when Toshinori called him at Gran's—but he's not expecting to see Izuku and Nana sitting side by side in the darkness as spirits, illuminated by their respective auras.

"Hey, Toshinori-san!" Izuku says, waving enthusiastically; Nana waves right alongside him. It's odd, seeing the two of them as spirits; Izuku's face and neck are covered in scars, and Nana fares no differently.

Still, though,

"Hey," Toshinori greets, raising a hand. "What's up?"

"Okay, so, um, we were looking for something to do," Izuku starts, *"and then we ended up playing cards for a while, and then Nana told me she taught you all of her tricks when it comes to cards, which is* not cool—"

"Your successor is just salty that he lost three to zero, Toshi."

"I'm not salty!"

"Mmhmm, sure, kiddo, sure."

"Anyway, we just wanted to say hi!" Izuku changes the subject at once, turning back to the camera and smiling at Toshinori. *"Y'know, just say hello and whatnot."*

It's now that Toshinori realizes Nana might be trying to cheer Izuku up, after what happened earlier at the mall. It makes sense; Nana was always that kind of person, someone who gave advice and encouragements whenever she could.

Toshinori is glad Izuku has her, at least. Her and the rest of the ex-holders (whom he has yet to actually meet).

"Oh, Toshi! That reminds me, I was thinking the other day, remember that time with Gran and that housecat you found on the street?"

Toshinori chokes. "Don't."

"Oh, I'm here for this," Izuku says, ignoring him. He turns to Nana excitedly. *"What about a house cat?"*

“Sensei, please.”

“We all did dumb stuff as a teenager! Besides, I’m not letting these stories go to waste!”

Toshinori lets out a long sigh. “Please.”

“Okay, okay, I won’t,” Nana says with a heaving sigh. And then, she smiles almost fiendishly and nudges Izuku’s shoulder. *“Hey, kiddo, wanna hear the one about the coke and the mentos?”*

“Heck yeah.”

“Sensei, *no!”*

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was pretty fun to write! We're getting into the forest training camp arc now, so I'm really looking forward to that! I have a lot planned and I hope y'all like what I come up with!

I'm not gonna say much, because my heart issues have been reaaaally kicking me in the butt today and I'm exhausted, but thanks so much for reading, and for all your continued support! Until next time, go beyond! PLUS ULTRA!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

City of Stars

Chapter Summary

"City of Stars" from La La Land

“City of stars, are you shining just for me?
City of stars, there’s so much that I can’t see.
Who knows? Is this the start of something wonderful and new?
Or one more dream that I cannot make true?”

Chapter Notes

Art!!

icanceledart

one-lazy-gamer

tbcart

chiinteguas

arts_of_aidan

Thank you all so much!! Enjoy the chapter! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The days fly by, and soon, the training camp is nearly upon them.

Toshinori has already spoken to the other teachers regarding the kids’ summer training camp, specifically how Toshinori himself—”All Might”—will not be attending. It makes sense. In light of all these recent villain mishaps, not to mention the fact that the League has made themselves very clear in that their biggest target is All Might, it’d be safer for everyone if he remained behind.

“You looking forward to camp, my boy?” Toshinori asks; he and Izuku are heading down the hallway following U.A.’s final class for the day. Tomorrow marks the beginning of their summer camp.

Izuku nods stiffly, but he seems distracted. Toshinori can’t help but notice how Howler intentionally bumps Izuku’s hand every now and then with his snout.

“Is something wrong?” Toshinori asks eventually. “You haven’t been yourself ever since the mall incident. What’s up?”

Izuku swallows hard. “Toshinori-san, could we…is there anywhere we could talk in private?”

Bit of an odd request, but Toshinori doesn’t let his concern show. Not yet. “Sure, kiddo,” he says, nodding. “The teacher’s lounge is open, we can talk there.”

Izuku nods stiffly again and falls silent—something that further fuels Toshinori’s worry.

Shortly thereafter finds the two of them and Howler in said teacher’s lounge. Unlike last time, Izuku and Toshinori are sitting together on the couch, while Howler lays obediently at Izuku’s feet.

“Alright, tell me what’s bothering you,” Toshinori says, turning towards him. “Whatever it is, it’s better to get it off your chest now before the training camp, don’t you think?”

Izuku takes in a breath, then nods. “We…I mean, me and Nana, we’ve…we’ve been talking about this for a while now, and…there’s something you need to know.”

Toshinori swallows. “Aright, tell me.”

Izuku looks at him. “You have to not freak out,” he says. “As soon as the words are out, you need to, just, take ten seconds to breathe or something before you respond.”

Toshinori frowns. “…Alright…?”

“Shigaraki is Nana’s grandson.”

He hears the words, but doesn’t fully compute their meaning until five whole seconds pass. When the words sink in, he feels vaguely like he’s been stabbed in the gut, and even though he acknowledges the words, he doesn’t accept them.

“Shigaraki is…”

“I didn’t want to believe it either,” Izuku says, looking away and squeezing his fingers. Howler settles his head on Izuku’s leg, and Izuku runs his fingers through the dog’s fur. “I talked to Nana after the thing at the mall, and we wanted to tell you sooner, but, we just…

there wasn't a good *time,* and—"

Toshinori doesn't know how to respond to this. It's still sinking in, the realization, and just when he thinks he *gets it,* it slams into him again.

"I'm—I'm sorry, I'll—" Izuku gets to his feet, pushing Howler off him. "I'll go now, I'm sorry, I shouldn't have just threw that on you, I'll—"

"Izuku."

Toshinori reaches out, grasps Izuku's wrist, and gently tugs him back towards him. Toshinori has the boy in his arms a moment later, and Izuku doesn't wait to return the embrace.

"I'm...thank you, for telling me," Toshinori says. "I'm not upset, I'm just—processing."

Izuku nods stiffly against his shoulder. "Yeah, I know, I...I don't really wanna think about it, either."

This certainly is a hard pill to swallow, and Toshinori is certain he'll choke several times before getting it down, but, in the end, whether or not he can swallow the truth doesn't make it any *less* of a truth.

For now, though, he pushes his own feelings aside. He knows he won't be at the summer camp with the kids, and this is most likely the last time he'll be seeing Izuku until the end of it, so he does whatever he can to make this hug last. God knows this kid goes through so much as it is, let alone adding this new revelation to it.

"Once you're up at camp," Toshinori says without letting go, "feel free to text me whenever you want."

Izuku's voice is small. "You're not coming?"

Toshinori shakes his head. "It's safer for you students if I stay behind, believe me. I'm like a walking target. Those villains will do anything to take me down, so you're better off without me."

Izuku nods, then pulls away. "I'll...see you at the end of summer, then."

Toshinori nods. He's still reeling, but for now, he does his best to be reassuring. "You betcha, my boy."

Training camp is upon them, and Izuku doesn't think he's ever been

more anxious. And by “anxious,” he’s both “anxious excited” and “anxious worried.” He’s been looking forward to this leading up to this day, but now that it’s actually *here* and all…

“Midoriya, you’ve been staring off into space and mumbling to yourself for quite some time now. Is something wrong?”

“Oh, no, nothing’s wrong!” Izuku answers quickly, spinning around and waving his hands back and forth. “I’m just nervous, y’know? I think we all are.”

Iida doesn’t seem completely convinced, but he nods and straightens his glasses. “Yes, well,” he says, “the bus isn’t here yet, so we have a bit more time to compose ourselves before the trip.”

“Right, yeah…”

Iida heads off, and Izuku looks at Howler, sitting patiently at his side. “You’re probably more ready for this than I am, aren’t you.”

Howler answers with a boof, and Izuku sighs.

He and his classmates are on the front lawn of U.A., waiting for the bus to arrive. The weeks leading up to this have been stressful for everyone, but now that the day is finally upon them, it’s even more so.

A summer training camp in a forest in the mountains. Should be fun.

Class 1-B arrives simultaneously with the buses. Monoma makes a couple snide comments that Kendo refutes with a karate-chop to the back of his neck, and she drags him off with an apology while Class 1-A stares and the voices in Izuku’s head leave a couple of their own snide remarks to Monoma’s retreating form.

They aren’t very fond of Monoma. They *do* like Kendo, though, her and the remaining members of Class 1-B.

Aizawa arrives, and the students load into the buses; one for Class 1-A, and another for Class 1-B. They’ll be taking a trail up the side of the mountain to their destination.

Izuku winds up sitting next to Uraraka. Everyone else fights for what seat they want best while Iida tries to maintain a semblance of order, and once everyone is seated, the driver starts off.

Kirishima and Sero fight for control of the aux cord, Jirou and a few

others are listening to music, others are chatting and laughing and making plans, wondering what summer will hold, and Izuku pulls out his notebook and doodles absentmindedly while Uraraka chats to Ashido in the row of seats in front of them.

"Whatcha drawin'?"

Izuku doesn't feel like explaining to Uraraka that he's talking to the voices in his head, so he scribbles his answer on the corner of the page.

Howler.

"Hmm, looks nice!"

"I approve of it so far, boyo!"

"NICE ONE, KID!"

Thanks, Izuku scribbles, then goes back to doodling. Howler is laying at his feet, so he uses that for reference.

"So, kiddo, how do you feel about training camp? You pretty confident, or no?"

I mean, I don't know, Izuku scribbles, taps the eraser of his pencil to his head, then goes back to it. *It's a learning experience for everyone so I don't really think it's something I can be confident about.*

"Ah, true. ...Hey, you've been sleeping better lately. That's good, right?"

Izuku nods. He *has* been sleeping better recently; it's been a while since he's had to relive an ex-holders' death in his dreams, and although he still has a lot on his plate, it *has* indeed been a while.

He pauses to himself, then sighs. *I probably just jinxed it,* he laments to himself, then goes back to doodling Howler.

"Whatcha doing, Deku?"

"Oh, just, doodling," Izuku says, erasing his notes to the ex-holders before Uraraka can look over his shoulder. "It's a nice pass-time when you don't have anything better to do."

Uraraka nods, but she seems distracted. She turns away and looks down at her hands for a long moment, and Izuku frowns.

"What's up?"

Uraraka bites her lip. "Deku, I...I'm sorry, about...about the whole thing at the mall. If I'd been there, I might've...I might've been able to help you with Shigaraki."

Izuku blinks once, then twice. "It's not your fault," he says, shaking his head. "I know if you'd been there you would've done whatever you could, but you weren't, so there's really no use getting upset with yourself about it. Plus, it all ended alright in the end, y'know?"

It would've been great to detain Shigaraki, sure, but it's like what Naomasa-san said. It's better that everyone got out safely.

Uraraka doesn't seem completely convinced, but she smiles fragiley and nods, and Izuku goes back to drawing while she starts up a conversation with Jirou across the aisle. This goes on for some time, Izuku doodling while his classmates chatter and play games around him, and after a while, he sets his notebook off to the side and rests his head against the window.

We've probably still got a ways to go, he thinks, shutting his eyes after watching nothing but trees pass by for a while. *Might as well sleep while I can…*

He wakes up to Uraraka shaking him. "Hey, Deku? We're at a rest spot, so if you wanna stretch your legs now's the time."

Izuku sits up and blinks several times to clear his vision; by the time he can think coherently, Uraraka is making her way down the center aisle along with the rest of the class.

Izuku gets to his feet, and Howler stands alongside him, ready to move. When the rest of his classmates step off the bus, Izuku takes off after them.

Izuku gives Howler the okay, and the dog scampers off to do his business. It's sunny way up here, and below them stretches forests as far as the eye can see; there's not even any sign of the city anymore, from all the way up here in the mountains.

I wonder how much farther we have to go, Izuku thinks, looking around him at his classmates. Kaminari is doing jumping jacks (and struggling with said jumping jacks), some of the girls are off to the side talking while the rest stand at the edge of the cliffside, looking down; Iida is

talking about something Izuku can't hear, swinging his arms animatedly, and Aizawa stands off to the side with the bus driver, watching.

It's quiet up here, Izuku thinks. They still have more driving to do, but for now, it's peaceful.

And then it suddenly isn't.

There are four of them, all dressed in cheesy, exaggerated cat costumes like the ones Izuku would see kids wearing on Halloween—except, he knows these four people. He's seen them on TV enough times.

"Rock on with these sparkling gazes!"

"We've come to lend a paw and help!"

"We have come from...somewhere…"

"Stingily cute and catlike! Wild, wild…"

"—Pussycats!" they finish in unison, striking a pose; Izuku can almost say the words along with them, he's heard them so often.

The Pussycats, a group made up of four pro heroes. They've been around long enough to be fairly well-known, though they don't make the top thirty when it comes to heroes.

"Heyo, kittens!" one of them says—Mandalay, that's her name. She has a telepathy Quirk. "Nice to see all of you!"

"Wait," Kirishima blinks, his expression mirroring everyone's confusion, "what's a group of pro heroes doing all the way out here…?"

"We *own* this land, silly!" Pixie-bob interjects with a grin. "The facility, these forests, all of it is Pussycat territory!"

That makes sense, Izuku thinks, looking off the side of the cliff at the endless canopy of trees beyond. It seems odd, Izuku thinks, for them to take a rest spot here in the middle of nowhere, with no facility or bathrooms or—

Unless it's not *a rest spot.*

The thought hits him around the same time Pixie-bob slams her hands

into the ground. The dirt trembles beneath them, and a second later, Izuku and his classmates are swept off their feet and off the side of the cliff.

Yep. Definitely not a rest spot.

Figures.

Izuku and his classmates land in heaps of dirt and twigs; Izuku is one of the first to rise to his feet, wincing, and as the dust settles, the rest of his classmates follow in suit.

“That was an experience,” Todoroki says, brushing dust off his forearms.

“A little extra, don’t you think?” Kaminari says, shaking his head feverishly and flinging dirt everywhere in the process.

“Good luck!” comes a shout from above; Izuku and the others raise their heads to look, and Pixie-bob waves to them enthusiastically. Howler is standing beside her, head cocked to one side in confusion. “You’ve got three hours to make it to the base of the mountain!”

“WE’VE GOT *WHAT?”* Sero hollers back up, but with a final wave, Mandalay spins around and vanishes from sight.

“Guess we’re fending for ourselves,” Jirou says, brushing herself off—and then, a low, animalistic growl comes from further within the forest, drawing all the students’ attention to the gaping darkness beyond the trees.

“We’ve got company,” Todoroki says, frost already growing on his fingertips.

“Yeah,” Izuku says, blanching. “Angry company.”

Fighting through all of Pixie-bob’s earthen monsters takes a *literal eternity*. ...Or, at the very least, what *feels* like a literal eternity. Three hours; that’s the amount of time provided to them to reach the training facility.

And it isn’t until evening, when the sun is already beginning to set, that Izuku and his classmates emerge from the forest, practically dragging themselves along, covered in dirt, grime, sweat, and twigs.

“Hey, you actually made it!” Pixie-bob says with a grin; Howler,

who'd been standing beside her up until just recently, notices Izuku and takes off towards him. Izuku doesn't even have time to brace himself before he's slammed into by the dog and taken to the ground.

"Oof—! Howler, you're gonna have to stop doing that!" Izuku says, shoving the dog's face away while laughing softly. Howler gives his face two more licks, then hops off and lets Izuku get to his feet. He's even dirtier than before, now covered in fresh dirt and dog slobber, but his spirits have been raised, if just a bit.

It isn't until he straightens up again that he notices a boy standing a little aways from the Pussycats. He can't be much older than ten (if even that old), and he's staring at the group of students with hard, narrowed eyes.

Izuku blinks.

And then, he has the brilliant idea of going to say hello.

To be frank, perhaps he'd been a bit too forward, introducing himself to this kid he didn't know. But did that *really* deserve a punch to the crotch? Really? He was just trying to be friendly, trying to put his best foot forward, maybe make a good first impression.

Maybe opening with a forest pun hadn't been one of his better ideas.

"Seriously, dude, even though *I* love your jokes, not everyone does," Kirishima says over dinner; the Pussycats had been nice enough to prepare them their meal for tonight, although they mentioned they'll be leaving the students to fend for themselves henceforth. "What was that thing you actually said to him? About 'branching out'?"

Izuku sighs. "I was pretty proud of it, honestly," he says, moving a carrot around his plate with his chopsticks for a moment. "Guess I was barking up the wrong tree, huh, Howler?"

Howler, laying under the table at Izuku's feet, ignores him.

Iida sighs heavily and shuts his eyes for a long moment. "And I thought *Tensei* was bad," he says, shaking his head. "Are you just making this up on the fly, Midoriya, or do you have an entire library worth of puns stored in your memory?"

"Bit of both, actually," Izuku answers, grinning. "Some of them are more *sappy* than others, of course—"

Iida doesn't just sigh this time—he *groans.*

"In total seriousness, though," Kirishima says, "I think punching ya was kind of...I don't know, extreme?"

Izuku nods slowly, looking down at his plate. "Yeah, I know what you mean," he says. "I think there's a different problem here that goes beyond just, not appreciating my puns. Which means, if we wanna be friends with him and not enemies, we need to get to the real root of the problem first."

Tokoyami stiffens. "...Was that another tree joke."

"I didn't mean to, this time," Izuku says, shaking his head, "but sure."

The rest of dinner passes uneventfully. Izuku and his classmates continue their meal mostly in silence, and then, the Pussycats open the hot springs for them. They'd done so with a fiendish grin and a word of advice for the students to enjoy this relaxation while they still could, which isn't reassuring at all.

For a while it's fine. Izuku's classmates either sink underneath the water or splash it at each other, and Izuku himself lets the hot water soothe his aching bones and the steam clear his sinuses.

But of course Mineta has to be his usual perverted self and cause trouble with the girls on the other side of the wall, and it's Kouta who stands at the top of said wall and knocks him down before he has the chance to scale it.

The girls cheer for Kouta—and then he himself loses his balance and topples off the edge. Izuku can barely activate Full Cowl in time to catch him.

"Thank you for bringing him in," Mandalay says; Kouta is laying on the couch, and she lays a wet rag over his head. "He fainted, but he's alright."

Izuku nods stiffly, rubbing his forearm and looking away for a long moment. He has a towel wrapped around his waist, and Howler stands at his side, looking up at him worriedly.

"Mandalay...Kouta hates us, doesn't he?"

Mandalay inhales sharply, then sighs. "...I don't think he hates *you* as

people," she says softly, "but...he *does* hate everything to do with heroes and those who want to become them."

The voices in his head are silent, as is Izuku for a long moment. "Mandalay, if you don't mind my asking, what...what happened?"

She drags in a long breath, then lets it out slowly. "Midoriya-kun, I'm sure you've heard of the Water Horses, haven't you?"

It clicks immediately, the name. "Oh, definitely!" Izuku says, nodding. "They were an incredible hero duo. They saved a lot of people during a lot of natural disasters, right up unti—"

Then, it *really clicks.* Not the name, but the full extent of what Mandalay is implying. It slams into Izuku like a truck, and he's left thoughtless, scrambling for words he can't find.

"...His parents, yes," Mandalay says slowly, and her eyes glisten. "They were killed in the line of duty. I'm—I'm sure you can imagine the kind of impact that has on a child."

Izuku can. He's lived it. Todoroki has lived it. Not losing parents to death, of course, but losing parents through other means. Like abandonment. Abuse.

"...The public," Mandalay goes on slowly, and there's a tremble to her voice now that wasn't there before. "While Kouta was suffering through all of that, they—they *praised* the Water Horses. They praised their heroic deaths, and...to a child, who'd just lost everything...seeing that...seeing the worst scenario treated like a *good thing…"*

Izuku swallows thickly. "Yeah, I—I get it. That's…"

He lets his voice trail off, simply because he doesn't know what else to say. Mandalay hums under her breath, nods, then turns to look at him. A single tear rolls down her cheek, though her hand snaps up immediately to brush it away.

"I know he's hard to get along with," Mandalay says, "especially since he wants absolutely nothing to do with you or your friends, but...he really is a good kid. I'd understand it if you can't, since he's already so hostile towards you and the others, but please, try not to judge him too harshly."

Izuku nods again, though he says nothing more.

“IT’S A SLEEPOVER!!” Ashido cheers, racing into the room with a pillow over her head. The students are sharing the same building for their sleeping quarters, though the girls’ side and the boys’ side is separated by a wall (much like the hot springs, actually). “FIRST ONES TO FINISH SETTLING IN WINS!!”

“Wins *what?”* Sero asks desperately, but the girls are already on the other side of the room, pouring into their half of the building to make ready. Shortly thereafter, the boys begin unpacking their things; the floors are bare aside from the carpet, and they make quick work of spreading out blankets and pillows across it to make a comfortable sleeping space.

“Where’d Mineta go?” Todoroki asks, unrolling one of his blankets and patting it down.

“I’m pretty sure Aizawa pulled him aside for a talk,” Satou answers, shaking his own blanket once or twice, then spreading it out as though he were at a picnic. “I know Mineta’s always been a pervert, but that wall-climbing stunt was taking it a little too far.”

“Hopefully Mineta learns from this,” Iida says, straightening his glasses. “That’s about all we can hope for now. Does everyone have everything they need? I brought extra blankets on the account that someone is without.”

“YOU’RE A LIFESAVER!” Kaminari cries, sitting on the floor with nothing but a pillow to his name, and soon Iida is handing out extra blankets to anyone who needs (or wants) them.

The girls return shortly thereafter, just as the boys are finishing up. “Did it!” Hagakure says, her sleeve shooting into the air. “What do you guys wanna do now? We have the whole night ahead of us to—!”

“No,” Iida cuts in, crossing his arms, “this isn’t a sleepover. Training camp officially starts tomorrow, we can’t afford to spend the night playing games or goofing off.”

“As much as I hate to be *that guy,* Class Rep’s got a point,” Kirishima says, nodding. “There’ll be time for fooling around once this whole training camp is behind us, don’tcha think?”

It takes some convincing, but in the end, the objections are weak ones; everyone’s exhausted from their plight to the facility, and it’s finally beginning to catch up with them after dinner and the hot springs.

The girls bid them goodnight before heading back to their sleeping quarters. Shortly thereafter, the boys settle down, too; Izuku removes Howler's harness and sets it off to the side, and the whispering amidst his classmates ceases shortly after Iida calls "light's out" and the room is enveloped by darkness.

Izuku's eyelids are already drooping, so he doesn't fight against it. The ex-holders bid him goodnight, and he sleeps.

He's standing knee-deep in sea water. The sky is cloudy, and rain splatters on and around him, soaking his hair and clothes; the ocean is tousled by waves, and a spray of salt water hits him in the face. It's fine, though. Actually, for this situation, it's *perfect.*

"Y'know, you picked the wrong day to show your ugly mug, All For One," he says, but it isn't his voice. It's Yukō's. "You could've picked any other day to fight me, and yet here we are. In the rain. By the ocean. You got some kind of a death wish?"

"Thought I'd give you the advantage," All For One answers, smiling, and he looks younger here, too, shaggy hair and green eyes. "You know, I didn't think my brother would actually have the gall to do it. Pass on his power. When you have something that *wonderful*... why would you want to give it up?"

Yukō spits. "Yeah, you wouldn't know, right?" he says, crouching. "All you do is take power away from people and make their lives a living hell."

"Oh?" All For One smiles at him, and it doesn't actually look fiendish, though that may be scarier. "Bold words for someone who's only heard about me from my brother. The first to speak in court always sounds right until the cross-examination begins; you'd do well to remember that."

"I don't need to hear your side of the story to know that you're a villain who enjoys watching people suffer," he says, gritting his teeth, "and I *definitely* don't need to hear your side of the story to beat you into the ground!"

"Well, then," All For One says, raising his hands. "Hit me with your best shot, Yukō. Let's see how well you hold up to my brother."

He grins, then clicks his tongue. "It's gonna be your downfall someday, All For One," he says, raising a single hand. "You're always

looking down on people."

The raindrops still falling around them stop dead in their tracks. All For One quirks an eyebrow, then twists his lips in an amused grin.

"You've gotten stronger," he says. "I'm impressed. However, you're going to have to do more than just freeze the rain to stop me."

Yukō narrows his eyes. "I'm aware of that," he says, "just like I know you lied about letting me have the first move."

All For One flicks his wrist; Yukō swings his arm around him, then thrusts both hands to the sky; the rain gathers and solidifies into a shield of ice in front of him. All For One's blast smashes into it. Yukō flies backwards, and when he sticks the landing, he's up to his waist in water.

The rain resumes. The waves crash around him. All For One strides forward, feet stopping just before the shore.

Yukō barks a chesty laugh and grins. "I might not be as athletic as I used to be," he says, straightening up and brushing a droplet of water off his face with his thumb, "but here...in this place…"

All For One straightens to his full height. He still does not touch the water. "I see," he says. "So One For All enhances your own Quirk, is that what it is? And you cultivate it and make it stronger."

"Would you quit monologuing!?" Yukō snaps, swinging out an arm. The rain stills around him, though the ocean continues to toil. "You made such a damn big show about leading me out here, the least you could do is offer me a decent fight!"

He slams his hands into the water; steam fogs the air, and waves rise and crash towards All For One. All For One raises both hands; a disc of purple like a shield comes in front of him between his fingers, and the water pours over it.

Yukō swings his arm through the air; the rain gathers together and freezes in the shape of a spear, and Yukō hurls it at the spot he knows All For One stands.

Just before the ice hits the water, Yukō drops the waves. All For One barely manages to fire off an explosive blast to shoot away the ice.

Dammit, he thinks, gritting his teeth. *Then again, I don't know why I*

thought that would work. This isn't going to be easy no matter which way you look at it.

"Considering you're only the second holder, you're pretty strong," All For One says idly, and Yukō raises his head to listen. The rain has resumed around them, and the ocean churns. "But, I will have you know, Tashibanna Yukō, I'm not as strong as I could be, either. Ever since my brother revolted against me, I've been steadily gathering Quirks I deemed useful specifically for this purpose."

"Pft, coward," Yukō says, rolling his eyes. "If you really wanted to beat me fairly, you'd do it without stealing other people's power."

All For One tilts his head and blinks green eyes. "I don't recall ever mentioning I would beat you fairly."

"Perfect," Yukō says, shifting into a stance. "Guess I'll go all out, then."

If I die today, I'm gonna do it without regrets.

No regrets. No changing my mind. None of that.

All For One attacks this time, left arm twisting and growing into something much more grotesque and inhuman; before Yukō can fully register what's happening, the blast is fired at him.

Yukō swings his arms; a wall of ice shoots from the ocean, and the blast collides with it. Yukō is thrown backwards, but he regains himself quicker than last time. It's still raining.

"My turn," he mutters, more to himself than anything, and he slams his hands into the ocean and sends as much water as he can right at All For One.

"You're a coward for fighting out there on your own little dry spot," Yukō says, grinning, "but you forget that it's been raining for the past thirty minutes now."

The first wave touches All For One's feet, and with a swipe of his hand through the water, Yukō freezes it. From where he's standing, all the way to All For One's feet, then through his sopping clothing and skin, the water freezes.

Yukō straightens up, panting. The ocean returns to normal. All For One's arm is still stretched out, but he does not move.

Damn, if it was really that easy to beat him, I'd be kind of disappointed.

The ice encasing All For One's body cracks, and the villain breaks free.

Shit, I take it back.

"You definitely know how to utilize your Quirk to its fullest extent," All For One says, shaking his head and flicking remaining shards of ice out of his hair, "which, I'll say, is pretty impressive. More than my brother ever did."

"You *forced* One For All on your brother," Yukō barks. "I'm surprised he didn't drive himself *insane."*

"Still," All For One says, raising his hand again, "it's a shame he couldn't hold his own against me. He went down faster than I thought he would, you know. I expected better from someone who spewed heroic nonsense so confidently. The only thing he was spewing when I was through with him was blood and regrets."

"Bastard!"

In the heat of it, he's overcome. All For One takes a step forward into the water, but Yukō doesn't have the chance to use it to his advantage before another one of All For One's trademark blasts throw him off his feet.

He can't regain himself, this time, and he rolls on his side in the shallow water, aching and burning from head to toe.

"Hm…" All For One looks down at his hand. "You know, I quite like this Quirk. Explosions. Very effective, especially when combined with other strength and speed enhancing Quirks."

Painfully slowly, Yukō gets to his feet. All For One *lets* him get to his feet.

"You talk a big game for someone who's only power is to steal what belongs to other people."

All For One laughs softly. "And you talk a big game for an old man on his last legs."

"So you'll kill me, whatever," Yukō says, rolling his eyes. "I've already got one foot in the door, s'not like you're takin' anything special from me. If you didn't kill me here, you'd just be stalling the inevitable."

“Is that so?” All For One takes another step forward. Yukō doesn’t falter. The rain falls harder and faster than ever. “You’re rather confident for someone in your predicament.”

“Like I said,” Yukō says, raising a hand, “I’ve imagined death so much it feels more like a memory. You don’t scare me.”

“Wonderful. I hope you don’t have any regrets, Tachibanna Yukō.”

He’s blasted back of his feet.

He lands in the water, deeper water this time, and he throws up his arms and sends a wave of boiling water at All For One. All For One swings a hand and brings back the purple shield to block it off; Yukō steals water from the rain and makes several small icicles, which he proceeds to hurl at All For One, dropping the wave of hot water just before they reach.

He’s blasted off his feet again. This time, when he lands, something in his leg twists and snaps.

Dammit, not now—!

He tries throwing up another wall of ice, but the blast slams into it, and the shockwave throws him backwards again. His head is underwater for a bit; he creates a pillar of ice beneath him, if just to keep his head above the waves.

“Admit it,” All For One advises, shrugging. “You’ve lost. There’s nothing you can do from here except die pathetically. If you hand over One For All to me, though, I may consider sparing your life.”

Yukō *laughs,* and All For One frowns. “What, you really think I’m still holding onto that damn thing?” Yukō asks, smiling. “It’s already with my successor, and she’s been training steadily for a little while now. In no time at all, she’ll be able to beat you into the ground where I couldn’t.”

“Is that so?” All For One tilts his head to one side. “I suppose she’ll miss you, then, don’t you think?”

Yukō only shakes his head. “No one’ll miss an old man like me.”

“Very well. If that’s how you want it…you were a worthy adversary. I hope you rest in peace.”

“Just what I wanna hear from my murderer. Burn in hell.”

All For One raises his hand, and Yukō closes his eyes to accept the blast.

It’s a second later that he notices.

The rain has stopped.

His eyes snap open. It isn’t that the clouds parted; no, the rain is still here, in the middle of falling, it’s merely halted.

Fear and dread and horror overwhelm him in the span of half a second. He’d feel more calm if All For One had his blaster pressed against his chest.

“I’m sorry, ojisan,” Kibō says, hands outstretched, eyes glazed and hair sopping wet. “But I’m not letting him kill you.”

No.

“Kibō, I told you *not to come!”* Yukō barks, and he does it intentionally to scare her. She’s fourteen now, so he doesn’t think he succeeds, but if he can scare her off— “Get out of here, now!”

All For One turns toward the girl. “I didn’t expect this,” he says, blinking. “You passed on One For All...to your *granddaughter.”*

Yukō snaps. All For One raises an arm, his left arm. Kibō snaps her wrists, and the rain shoots in harmony at All For One.

It hits him in the face, almost directly in the eyes. He stumbles backwards. Yukō’s feet slam the water. Kibō’s eyes are glassy and dazed, and she’s breathing heavily, but she swings her arms, and a wave crashes over All For One.

He’s letting her do this.

Yukō grits his teeth.

Why is he letting her live?

“Intriguing.” All For One reaches upwards and touches the ice around his face; it cracks and splinters, then falls. “You’d rather give your life than watch your grandfather die. Why is that?”

Kibō looks him dead in the eyes. “Because I’m here, and because I

can."

"Kibō, do that thing we practiced, now!"

Kibō rallys the rain again and swirls it around her, then freezes it. Before All For One can register what's happening, Yukō raises both arms, pushes toward his limit, and brings down as much water as he can on All For One.

It's a distraction at best, but it gives him time. Kibō drops the ice, Yukō grabs her around the waist, and he gathers the rain to make a makeshift disk of ice to bring them back into the ocean. They aren't as far away as he'd like, but they're far away enough.

"Kibō, *what the hell?"* Yukō snaps, taking her by the shoulders and looking her into the eyes. "I told you not to, I *told you—"*

"I know you did," Kibō slurs, blinking feverishly. "I know you did."

"You haven't been working with One For All for very long, if you try pushing it like this it could *kill you—"*

"You were about to die."

The words slam into him harder than All For One's blasts ever could, or will.

"You were going to give up," Kibō says, looking at him. "You can't do that. Please, don't...don't do that."

She's right. He'd been more than ready to accept death. It doesn't bother him, but, to her eyes…

"I'm sorry," he says immediately, glancing over his shoulder. All For One is still standing there, watching them. Waiting. "Listen, Kibō, you *really have to get out of here.* I'll fight him, I swear, just get out of here."

Kibō bites her lip. "...You'll fight him."

"Yeah."

"You...won't give up."

"I won't, swear it."

"You'll win?"

He hesitates.

"...I'll try my damndest. Now go."

Kibō stands, and Yukō stands with her. She makes a fist and swirls it; rain gathers and makes another disk, just like Yukō's. It lands in the water and floats, and Kibō hops onto it.

"Do it," Kibō says, and it's only now that Yukō notices the tremble in her voice, the tears in her eyes. "Do your best, Sensei. Ojisan."

Yukō grins. "I'll raise as much hell as I can," he says.

And he does. Kibō rides the waves home, and Yukō does whatever he can.

It concludes with him sinking into the depths of the ocean, bleeding from several wounds. He isn't sure which one actually killed him. He can't tell.

Kibō…

…Good luck. You've got this.

Tenya wakes up to a soft, quiet round of incessant beeping, not unlike his own alarm clock back at home.

He sits up, reaching over blindly and settling his glasses over his face once he grabs them off the floor. He blinks several times and lets his eyes adjust to the darkness; his classmates are all sleeping, some sprawled on top of each other, blankets askew and in some cases, abandoned.

The beeping continues, and with a start, Tenya realizes he recognizes the sound.

Fumbling slightly in the darkness, he moves towards a blinking red light. Midoriya is curled on his side, half-covered with his blanket. If it weren't for his blinking medical bracelet and Howler sitting guard over him protectively, Tenya wouldn't have suspected a thing.

Except, he knows better.

He looks at Howler. "He's gone?" Tenya whispers, and Howler immediately raises his head and points his nose towards the back door leading outside the dorm. Tenya whispers a thank you (though he isn't

a hundred percent sure why, considering Howler is, well, a *dog),* then gets to his feet and heads outside.

It's dark, but not cold. Tenya doesn't feel right about leaving the dorm after curfew (although the Pussycats never assigned a specific curfew; it's kind of a given that students shouldn't be wandering around in the middle of the night), but his worry for Midoriya surpasses that, so he presses on.

It takes a bit of walking, but he soon finds himself beneath a canopy of trees in the nearest forest. Standing a little farther ahead, facing each other, is Midoriya and another spirit that Tenya doesn't recognize.

Tenya has never encouraged eavesdropping or thought snooping was a good idea, but Midoriya looks deeply upset by something, even as a spirit with a near-transparent figure, so Tenya can't help but pause and listen, if just this once.

"...should've done this sooner," Midoriya is saying, shaking his head. "I've been...I-I mean, I should've—I should've summoned you guys sooner than just recently. Everything you've gone through, how you all died, I..."

The other spirit shakes his head. "Nah, don't be like that, boyo," he says. "It's a lot to take in, I'm sure. Summoning the dead can't be good for your mental state of mind—"

"I'm fine," Midoriya says.

"Yeah, sure ya are. And I'm alive."

"Yukō-san—"

"You care too much," the spirit, Yukō, scolds. Now that Tenya gets a good look at him, he sees that the man is tall, skinny, and surrounded by soft gray light. "It's great to care about other people, but giving yourself no regard...that's not healthy, boyo. You're gonna wind up getting yourself killed, and what'll your loved ones do then, huh? You'll be leaving them behind."

"Y-Yukō-san—"

"If you can't find it in you to live for yourself," Yukō says, "then live for the people you know love you. You've got a lot of them, you know that. Right?"

Midoriya swallows hard, but nods shakily. “I-I know,” he says, “I just, I’m…I feel so…lost.”

Every “good friend” part of Tenya is shrieking at him to get out of here, but the closer, more real “look after him” part of him is louder. Something’s wrong, and Tenya needs to find out what it is if he wants to help.

“We all feel lost sometimes,” Yukō says, shaking his head. “It’s part of this *beautiful* hell called ‘being human.’ And it’s okay to feel lost, but it’s important you let someone know when you do. Being lost is a lot easier to deal with when you’ve got someone there to help guide you back on track.”

“I…I guess.”

“Good.” Yukō reaches out and ruffles Midoriya’s hair fondly. “Wellp, go ahead and drop it. Don’t wanna overwork yourself, you’ve got a long day tomorrow.”

“A-Alright,” Midoriya says, nodding. “Thank you, Yukō-san.”

“Bah, don’t thank me. If you can manage it, try to get a good night’s sleep, alright?”

“I’ll try.”

Yukō smiles, and Midoriya shuts his eyes briefly. When he opens his eyes again, Yukō has faded into nothingness, and Midoriya is left alone.

It’s now that Tenya realized he’s most likely overstayed his welcome, but it’s too late to turn back now. He *could* simply retreat into the dorm without saying anything, but that hardly seems like the right thing to do.

So.

“Midoriya.”

Midoriya jumps, *jumps,* and whirls around to face him with panic in his eyes. “I-Iida,” he says, when he realizes who it is. “W-Wait, how much did you hear—”

“Just the tailend of it,” Tenya says, raising his hands. “I’m sorry for eavesdropping, but you seemed…” He pauses a moment.

"...Distressed."

Midoriya bites his lip. "I'm...I'm fine, Iida. I'm sorry for worrying you."

There's always been a certain sense of mystery surrounding Tenya's friend; his mutation Quirk, his primary Quirk that comes with an odd bonus feature of being able to summon spirits, which belies Midoriya's own pun-loving personality; but, regardless of how little or how much Tenya understands about his friend, one thing remains.

"...Do you remember what you told me, back before I went after Stain?"

Midoriya blinks. "What? Why are you—"

"You told me I could come talk to you if I needed a friend," Tenya interrupts, "and, while I didn't *heed* that advice—" A lot of images flash through his mind's eye, the lingering one being Midoriya in a pool of his own blood with a knife in his chest, "—I didn't forget. It meant a lot to me, when you told me and kept telling me, even when I was stubborn and didn't— *wouldn't* listen."

Midoriya blinks again. "Iida—"

"So," Tenya cuts in again, "it only makes sense for it to work both ways, don't you think? In which case, if there's something wrong, Midoriya, I would...I would like to know. I cannot help you otherwise."

Midoriya's face hasn't changed this entire time, but now, he smiles, though it's crooked and more of a wince. "Thanks, Iida," he says, shifting his weight and rubbing his forearm. "I guess I just— nevermind, just, thank you."

Tenya nods, though his mind is already elsewhere. "Would you like to talk about it now?"

Midoriya shifts his weight again. "I-Iida, it's, it's late, we should be—"

"Midoriya. Would you like to talk about it now."

He stiffens, and there's a long beat of silence before he answers. "N-Not...not really. Not right now."

It's better than a straight "no," Tenya supposes. He nods, deciding not

to push his friend for now; there'll be a time and a place to talk about all this later. "Are you heading back to bed?"

Midoriya bites his lip. "H-Honestly, I don't think I'd be able to fall asleep again if I tried."

That makes sense. Whatever is troubling Midoriya is obviously a big deal, though Tenya has no idea what it is or even what it *could* be.

"Would you like me to stay with you?"

Midoriya's head snaps up, and panic pours into his eyes. "N-No, that's fine, I don't wanna make you do that—!"

"If you're going to remain out here," Tenya cuts in, "I would feel better if you weren't alone. Besides, I want to. It's like I said; I want to be here for you if something's wrong."

Midoriya opens his mouth, shuts it, then slumps in resignation. "...Only if you really want to."

Tenya nods. "Your medical bracelet was beeping," he says like an afterthought. "It was slow, but I'd advise you retrieve your body—" good *lord* that's weird to say out loud "—before anything else."

Midoriya is already nodding and stepping in the direction of the dorm. Tenya waits for him.

He returns about five or so minutes later, paler in the face than usual with dark rings beneath his eyes. Tenya notices that Howler isn't with him.

"I told him to stay behind," Midoriya says when he asks why. "I want him to be able to rest when he can."

Tenya nods. That makes sense. They find a fallen tree a little further into the forest, and take a seat down on it. Tenya says nothing for a long moment, and neither does Midoriya, and while the silence isn't exactly *uncomfortable,* Tenya still feels like he should fill it with *something.*

"Is there...a specific reason why you're out this late at night?" Tenya inquires.

Midoriya takes in a breath. "There's this...weird side-effect of summoning the spirits," he says slowly. "I relive their deaths

sometimes in my dreams, so...y'know, that's always...that kinda messes a person up."

Tenya blanches. "I bet," he says, nodding. "I'm sorry, Midoriya."

Midoriya turns away, looking more drawn and exhausted than what should be possible for a sixteen year old. His eyes glow in the darkness, like they always do, but their light is softer this time. Less vibrant. "It's—It's fine. It doesn't make it any easier, but I'm—I'm used to it."

"How long has this been going on for?"

"Since the Sports Festival," Midoriya answers. He threads his fingers together and squeezes. "The first time I had one of these weird death-dream things was the night just before the Sports Festival, actually."

"...That would explain your odd behavior," Tenya realizes, feeling vaguely like he'd been punched in the gut. "You hadn't acted like yourself at all that day. I'd been meaning to ask you about it, when everything was said and done, but then—"

He'd gotten the call from his mother about Tensei.

"I get it," Midoriya says, shaking his head, "it's fine. It's—I mean, it's about as fun as it sounds, and of course it's pretty messed up when I actually stop to think about it, but I'm really okay."

Tenya frowns at him. "You don't *seem* okay."

In typical Midoriya-fashion, he brushes it off. "I'm just tired. I'll be fine tomorrow. For now, I just...I don't wanna think about it."

That's fair. Tenya nods and doesn't bring it up again; except, he does notice something else, once he shifts his eyes away from Midoriya's face.

"...How long has that been there?"

Midoriya turns and blinks. "How long has what been there."

"That white in your hair."

"The wh—" Midoriya stops. "Wait, you can—is it noticeable?"

"Well…" Tenya reaches out, pinching a lock of Midoriya's bangs between his fingers. Midoriya looks up at it, cross-eyed for a moment.

“This entire strand is white.”

Tenya lets go, and Midoriya runs his fingers through his hair, pulling that specific lock down into his line of vision every now and then. “Guess it’s spreading,” he says, letting it go again.

“Spreading?” Tenya frowns. “Midoriya, your hair is turning *white,* don’t you think you should tell someone about this?”

“My eyes glow in the dark, I summon spirits, relive their deaths in my dreams, shatter my bones just by flicking my fingers, and eject my ghost out of my body,” Midoriya counts off, shaking his head. “If I ran to Recovery Girl every time my Quirk did something weird, I’d never be out of that office.”

Tenya opens his mouth to retort, but he knows by now that arguing with Midoriya has about as much chance of success as reasoning with a cat, so he decides against it.

“Then, allow me to conduct my own research on the matter,” he says instead, straightening his glasses. “If just for my own peace of mind.”

Midoriya looks like he’s about to argue against it, but changes his mind at the last second. He nods. “That’s...I-I guess that’s fair.”

“Considering what you’ve been through, I believe it’s far more than simply ‘fair.’”

Midoriya falls silent after that, as does Tenya shortly thereafter. At least, for a time.

“...Iida, I...thanks for staying with me.”

“Don’t mention it,” Tenya returns warmly. “I don’t know what kind of class representative—actually, no, what kind of *friend* I’d be if I left you alone out here when you needed me the most. Know that, no matter what happens, I’m here for you. You don’t have to be afraid to tell me anything. I may not always have the best advice, but, just keep in mind that you aren’t alone, alright?”

Midoriya *stares.* His bright eyes shimmer. “You—”

“I mean it, Midoriya. Every word.”

Midoriya turns away again sharply and brings both hands up to cover his face. “I— *thank you.”*

Tenya reaches over and squeezes his shoulder. “Like I said, you don’t have to thank me. I’m happy to be here.”

In this moment, there’s nowhere else he’d rather be.

Chapter End Notes

> Ahh, sorry this chapter took so long! I’ve already explained the situation on my tumblr, but I had a bunch of doctor appointments and I have a heart surgery scheduled for August 28th. It isn’t an open-heart surgery (I’m fairly certain it’s laparoscopic), but yeah, that’s a thing that’s happening.
>
> I’m doing alright, though! Pretty soon it’ll be behind me. Thanks for all of your support everyone, and I hope you enjoyed the chapter!! I’ll do my best to update again soon!
>
> Thanks for sticking with me! Until next time, go beyond! PLUS ULTRA!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Bring On the Monsters

Chapter Summary

"Bring On the Monsters" from The Lightning Thief: The Percy Jackson Musical

“There’ll be times when your faith is shaken.
They’re breaking your heart? Then try to hear it pound.
Got to know where the real fight lies.
When it’s time to rise and stand your ground.
They’ll put us in a box but we won’t be contained.
You keep hoping. You keep your eyes open.
‘Cause the sea doesn’t like to be restrained.”

Chapter Notes

Art!!

blueseaanraingirl

Thank you so much!! :D Enjoy the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Staying outside all night was hardly the optimal thing to do, but considering the situation, it seemed like the *only* thing to do. Izuku’s only regret is that he’d gotten Iida dragged into it.

“I told you, Midoriya,” Iida says the following morning after he and Izuku managed to get *at best* three hours of sleep, “I’m glad I was there for you. You’d do the same for me in a heartbeat, wouldn’t you?”

It’s a rhetorical question, so Izuku merely sighs in response. “Still, Iida, thank you. Having someone there last night, it…it really helped a lot.”

Iida offers him a soft smile, and Izuku returns it as best he can.

Training starts with Aizawa having Bakugou launch a baseball into the sky as far as possible, and from that moment on, it’s non-stop. Izuku has never regretted not getting a full night’s sleep as much as he does now.

Working themselves to their limit is exhausting, mentally and physically. Eijirou's Quirk has never been particularly flashy, but that doesn't mean it doesn't tax him the same way it does his classmates.

Midoriya and Iida seem to be struggling more than the rest of them, though, and that's something that doesn't make a whole lot of sense. Iida trips several times while running laps, which isn't like him at all, and Midoriya gets this far-off look in his eyes that usually doesn't go away until Tiger lands a punch on him.

The last time Eijirou saw Midoriya with this far-off, not entirely *here* kind of look was shortly after the final exams, after he and Bakugou spent the entire time yelling at each other and *definitely not* working together.

It sucks. Since that day, Bakugou and Midoriya have intentionally avoided each other, not even even making direct eye contact aside from accidentally. On one hand, Eijirou wants to side with Midoriya, because he's obviously the one trying to mend things between him and Bakugou (whatever "things" that might be), but at the same time, Eijirou can't help but wonder what things are like on Bakugou's end. He wonders what Bakugou thinks about all of this.

So he risks it. Aizawa and the Pussycats have been very strict about their "no breaks" rule, but Eijirou risks getting in trouble to cross the training field towards Bakugou. While he considers Midoriya a close friend, he *doesn't* consider Bakugou an enemy. For his and Midoriya's relationship to be as messed up as it is, something must've happened.

"Oy, Bakugou! Can I talk to you for a sec?"

Bakugou sends an enormous explosion into the sky. Eijirou brings up his arms to shield his face from the smoke, then lowers them again and stares in awe. Bakugou's Quirk really is something…

"What do you want, weird hair?"

Eijirou is brought back around to the whole reason he's here, and he doesn't waste time beating around the bush. "I'm curious," he says simply, while Bakugou dunks his hands into a bucket of water and raises them over his head. "You and Midoriya...you really hate each other, don't you?"

Bakugou fires off the blast. Eijirou shields himself again, and when he lowers his arms, Bakugou is glaring at him.

“I don’t see why any of that is your damn business,” Bakugou snarls, like Eijirou knew he would. “Get out of here, we’re supposed to be training.”

“It kind of is my business, actually,” Eijirou says, and he has a serious sense of deja vu. They’d had a conversation like this before back at the USJ. “...Listen, Bakugou, I don’t know anything about you or what’s the deal between you and Midoriya, but if something’s the matter, if there’s a problem, or something you’re dealing with, I mean...I want you to know I’m available to talk if you need someone, alright?”

Bakugou sends off another blast into the sky. It’s the biggest one so far. “Yeah, whatever,” he snaps, “just go away.”

Eijirou doesn’t push it. It doesn’t seem right to, and honestly, with the cold shoulder Bakugou’s giving him, it doesn’t seem *smart* to, either. Maybe he’ll have more luck asking Midoriya.

“Alright, good luck!” Eijirou says instead of asking anything else. He then salutes, spins, and races back towards his training grounds. Hopefully Aizawa hasn’t noticed he’s gone…

They *do* get a short break to take a breather and hydrate themselves a little further into their training. Now, exhausted and spent, Izuku leans against the wall of the facility, breathing harshly, holding a near-empty water bottle in one hand.

“This is hard,” he murmurs, wiping sweat off his forehead with his forearm. “I mean, it’d be hard enough *without* the sleep deprivation, but…”

“You’ll be alright, just try to get some sleep tonight,” Kibō says. It’s weird to hear her voice as it is now, deeper and more mature, nothing like the teenager she’d been in his dream. *“It’ll be hard, but you can make it through today, I know you can.”*

“Thanks, I’ll...I’ll try,” Izuku says. He caps his water bottle, then shuts his eyes and sinks to the ground, resting the back of his head against the wall.

“If you think you need to step out and take a rest, you should say something to Aizawa,” Dai advises. *“It isn’t safe for you to keep training like this if you’re not feeling your best.”*

“And tell him the truth,” Nana adds a moment later. *“He’ll see right*

through it if you try making up an excuse. You don't have to tell him everything, *but don't lie."*

She has a point. He sighs. "Yeah, I know," Izuku says, "I just—"

"Yo, Midoriya."

Izuku opens his eyes. Kirishima stands across from him, smiling, one hand raised in greeting. There's still sweat on his face, along with dirt and grime, but he doesn't seem daunted by their intense training whatsoever. Unlike Izuku.

Slowly, Kirishima's smile fades. "Man, now that I'm seeing you up close, you really do look awful," he says, moving and sinking to the ground beside Izuku. "You miss sleep or something?"

"That's an easy way of putting it, yeah," Izuku says, shaking his head to knock some of the exhausted fog away. "Sorry I've been so out of it today."

"Nah, you're good," Kirishima says, shrugging. "We all have bad days. But you might wanna think about talking to Aizawa or the Pussycats about it. Training isn't something you should be doing if you're sick or sleep deprived."

Izuku sighs. "Yeah, I guess…"

Kirishima nods and turns his head, looking towards the training fields. The rest of their classmates are standing in small groups, with varying distances between them; Uraraka, Ashido, and Jirou are on the ground looking up at the sky, Kaminari and Sero look like they're racing to see who can guzzle their water the fastest, Satou and Tokoyami are sitting in the shade of a tree, discussing things quietly—

"Hey, dude, can I ask you something? It's been bugging me for a while now."

Izuku frowns. "...Sure…?"

"That thing you did at the mall," Kirishima says without looking at him. "When you pinned down Shigaraki and wouldn't let go. I had to bodyslam you just to get you off of him, and even then, I knew you just wanted to get up and grab him again. Why?"

"I wasn't thinking clearly," Izuku answers, shaking his head. "The only thing I *was* thinking about is how great it would've been to get

Shigaraki in police custody. I mean, he's the one leading the League into battle every time. If we can take him out—"

"But do you really think that's worth your own life, Midoriya?"

Izuku stops. Lots of images flash through his mind in the span of a second; Nana, blasted off her feet, Senshi in the hospital room, Kibō breathing her last, Aki plunging from a rooftop, Dai with a spike through his chest, Yukō's ice shattering—

"What?" Izuku blurts.

"Sorry, that was—that was kind of a harsh question," Kirishima says, shaking his head, "I just...dude, you were just so *dead set* on detaining Shigaraki, to the point where it was kind of scary. It...I was pretty freaked out, honestly. I just wanted to know why you wouldn't let go."

"I don't have a specific reason other than that I was being stupid and got caught up in the heat of the moment," Izuku says, looking down. "I'm—I'm sorry, Kirishima. It won't happen again."

"Yeah, please don't let it," Kirishima says, shoulders slumping as he shakes his head. "I won't always be around to keep you from getting swallowed up by that warp gate dude. You've gotta look after yourself s'more."

Izuku swallows, but nods. "I'll...do my best."

"There's one more thing, too, actually."

Izuku blinks. "What is it?"

"It—" Kirishima stops, then sighs and shakes his head. "Nevermind, I'll ask you later."

"What?"

"Later," Kirishima repeats.

"Hold on, you can't just spring something like that on me and then say you wanna talk later—"

"It's about Bakugou."

Izuku stops. "...Oh."

"....Yeah."

He swallows. Right now, Bakugou is the *last* person Izuku wants to think about. “Yeah, actually, let’s talk about that some other time. Forget I even said anything.”

“Yeah, sorry,” Kirishima says, rubbing the back of his neck. A second later, he stretches and pushes himself to his feet. “Wellp, I’ll leave you alone now. Rest up while you can, alright? And don’t be afraid to tell someone if you need a break, we won’t think any less of ya.”

Izuku swallows, then nods. “Thanks.”

“Don’t mention it. Something’s definitely up if you and Iida aren’t at your best, so maybe you *should* bring this up to one of the teachers.”

Izuku considers this, Nana and Dai’s advice included, then nods. “Maybe I should.”

He decides to push himself a little further, though. After sitting out for a while with the others, getting rehydrated, and petting Howler for a solid five minutes, he feels a little better. Still exhausted (mentally, emotionally and physically), but okay enough to get back into training. He’s just glad his medical bracelet is water-resistant, because he’s almost literally sweating buckets.

The Quirk training goes on for a while longer, after that. A good hour or two of them pushing themselves to their utmost limits and then some, just like they’d done at the start of the day. The ex-holders voice their own encouragements and advice throughout it all, and it’s a nice morale booster when all Izuku wants to do is faceplant the grass and never get up again.

“Alright.” Aizawa approaches, and the students stop what they’re doing to listen. “Up until this point, all we’ve been doing is Quirk training, but I’d like to do a couple rounds of one-on-one hand to hand combat.”

“A couple what,” Izuku murmurs, eyes heavy.

“It’s important to enhance your Quirks,” Aizawa goes on when the students look less than thrilled, “but it’s just as important to know how you stand without them as well. We’ll be working on basic combat along with Quirk enhancement through this summer bootcamp.”

As much as that makes sense, that doesn’t mean Izuku has to like it.

Maybe he'll have a bit of a head start, though; after all, he did learn some hand to hand combat strategies under Gran Torino. Maybe he'll be able to get through it without incident despite his current state.

The students are divided into groups of two to fight each other; Izuku is paired with Kaminari, set to go sixth. Aizawa's only set rule here is that Quirks aren't allowed for this exercise, which is the complete opposite of what the students had been doing up to this point.

The students were assigned to fight each other at random; the next time they do it, they'll rotate, so everyone has a different competitor every time. Uraraka beats Sero in a matter of seconds. Iida flails a bit (no doubt due to his own exhaustion, which stabs Izuku with a pang of guilt), but gets the drop on Mineta. Bakugou has an easy victory against Jirou, and Satou and Shouji tousle a bit before Shouji emerges victorious. Tokoyami struggles a bit while pinning Aoyama to the ground, but his victory is definite.

Then comes Izuku and Kaminari's turn. Izuku steps up and shifts into a stance; Kaminari shifts into one across from him, holding his forearms in front of his face. He's definitely out of practice in this area —Izuku can tell by his posture—but he isn't the *worst.*

Aizawa claps twice, and Izuku makes the first move. Kaminari flails a bit when Izuku throws the first punch, but ducks to avoid it, then springs and stumbles backwards when Izuku attempts to bring his knee into Kaminari's stomach.

Izuku's movements are sloppy at best, and each punch feels weak and half hearted. Regardless, he's more experienced here than Kaminari; if he times it right, he should still be able to pin Kaminari down.

He swings his fist again, and when Kaminari stumbles back, he hooks his foot behind Kaminari's calf and yanks. Kaminari yelps and tips backwards, and in a desperate attempt to keep himself up, he snakes his fingers around Izuku's outstretched forearm.

Izuku feels white-hot something coil through his veins. His vision flickers between bright and black, and he's dragged into oblivion before he hits the ground.

"Midoriya. *Midoriya!"*

Izuku's eyes snap open. His head is pounding, and the treetops and clouds are blurry; through his ringing ears, he can hear Kaminari's

high-pitched voice saying *something,* and closer and more distinguishable, Aizawa.

“Hey, Midoriya.” Fingers snap in his face, and Izuku blinks up again before shifting his gaze. Aizawa is kneeling by him on the ground; surrounding them in a ring are the rest of the Class 1-A students, concern etched out on their faces. “You with us?”

Izuku nods. Aizawa takes him by the forearm and helps him sit up, and although Izuku’s head spins and he feels like he’s going to be sick for a moment or two, he manages to keep his stomach where it belongs.

“Dude, I’m so sorry!” Kaminari shrieks, and he kneels on Izuku’s other side, looking frantic and guilty. “I’m sorry, I wasn’t thinking about what I was doing and I accidentally—!”

“It’s fine, man, it’s fine,” Izuku says, waving a hand and blinking feverishly in an attempt to clear his vision. “Just, stop yelling, it’s fine.”

Aizawa looks him in the eyes for a moment, then turns to address the rest of the students. “Everyone, continue on with Tiger,” he says, tightening his hold on Izuku’s forearm and pulling him to his feet. Izuku staggers, but doesn’t fall. “I’ll be sitting out with Midoriya for a bit.”

“Dude, are you seriously okay?” Sero asks, eyes wide. “You look pretty out of it—”

“I’m fine,” Izuku says, shaking his head again to clear his vision, “just a little...shocked.”

Sero lets out a huge sigh. “...Well,” he says, turning to the others, “he’s definitely fine, that’s for sure.”

They go back to sparring another minute later (although Izuku catches Iida giving him a concerned look as he turns away), and Aizawa leads Izuku off to the side. They sit down on a bench, and now that he’s sitting down, Izuku feels an odd, numbing sensation come over his limbs.

“You’ve been acting odd since this morning,” Aizawa comments, watching the students spar up ahead. “What’s up with you today, Midoriya?”

Izuku swallows. “Just...I had a hard time sleeping last night, so—”

“That’s obviously not it. What’s wrong with your hair?”

Izuku had looked at himself this morning through his phone camera; the roots of his hair are growing in white, but he also has a small strand that’d turned entirely white, the one that Iida had pointed out last night. It definitely hadn’t been there before.

“I—it’s just a part of my Quirk,” Izuku says hoarsly, shaking his head again. He doesn’t like this numb, dizzying sensation at all. “I-I mean, I don’t know what else it could be…”

Aizawa frowns at him, then looks away again. “You aren’t telling me everything.”

Izuku doesn’t lie. “I—I *can’t* tell you everything,” he says, then bites his lip for a long moment. “I just—there’re some things going on, and I can’t—I just, I don’t know. I don’t know what to do anymore.”

Aizawa nods, acknowledging it. “Have you talked to anyone about this? Anyone at all?”

“Yes,” Izuku says, “I have.”

“Then you don’t need to tell me anything you’re not comfortable with,” Aizawa says. “As long as you’re talking to *someone* about all of this, then I won’t make you tell me. However, that said, if things continue the way they are now and it starts putting you in danger…”

“It won’t,” Izuku promises, “it’s just—it’s just today.” *As long as I don’t have another dream like the one I had last night…* “I’ll be fine tomorrow.”

“Alright,” Aizawa says. “Feel free to come talk to me for any reason, though. I *am* your teacher. If you want to talk, I’m here to listen, and I’ll do whatever I can to help.”

Izuku has always known that Aizawa cared a great deal for him and his classmates, but hearing these things out loud means a lot to him. “Thank you,” he says, nodding, “I will.”

Aizawa nods, then raises his head towards the students once again. “Iida,” he hollers, raising a hand; Iida turns around immediately and jogs over. “You and Midoriya,” Aizawa says once Iida stops in front of them, “you’ve got an hour. Go back to the dorm and rest.”

Iida's eyes find Izuku's for a moment, before both of them turn back to Aizawa.

"Thank you!" Iida bows instead of arguing (another sign that Iida is more exhausted than he'd let on), and once Izuku feels alright enough to stand on his own, he and Iida return to the dorm, and Aizawa returns to the remaining students.

"Are we really that transparent?" Izuku asks quietly as they walk.

Iida nods. "I suppose it shows," he says. "Even if I *hadn't* been out with you all night, I still would know something was wrong with you today."

"Yeah, vice versa."

Iida nods, then switches topics. "You were electrocuted?"

"Kaminari, on accident. I'm fine. Kind of numb and grounded, but fine."

Iida frowns. "'Grounded'?"

"Oh, just, sometimes my spirit can't actually leave my body, like if I'm in pain," Izuku answers simply. "When that happens, I guess everything just feels kind of...tight? If that makes sense?"

"So you're grounded in your body, you mean."

"Exactly."

Iida ponders this for a moment. "Midoriya, your—"

"—Quirk doesn't make any sense."

Iida blinks at him; they'd finished it together. Iida exhales sharply through his nose, then shakes his head. "Regardless," he says, "I'm sure you'll figure everything out. I have no doubt."

It's nice to hear that. Izuku smiles. "Thanks, Iida."

For the one hour they're given, they crash *hard,* and when they wake up again, they both feel more energized and rejuvenated. The rest of the afternoon goes uneventfully. Right up until training ends and Izuku and his classmates return to the main building for dinner.

“We made your meal last night,” says Ragdoll, grinning almost derangedly, “so now it’s your turn, kittens!”

That’s what Izuku was afraid of. While the Pussycats clear out of the cookout area, everyone slumps their shoulders and looks down at the ground.

“COME NOW, EVERYONE!” Iida choruses, leaping out in front of them and swinging his arms needlessly. “THIS IS A GREAT TIME TO HARNESS OUR CUTLERY SKILLS! LET’S ALL DO OUR BEST TO MAKE THE BEST CURRY EVER IMAGINABLE!”

“Yaaaaaaaay,” choruses everyone.

Once they actually start moving, though, it isn’t as bad. Soon they’re all into it, chopping veggies and making the broth base and warring between which seasonings to use to make the best curry they can. Izuku finds himself gathering an armful of firewood and making his way over to Todoroki, standing by the woodstove.

“Hey,” Izuku says, kneeling down and depositing the firewood on the ground in front of him. Howler drops the single piece he’d been carrying around between his teeth.

“Hey,” Todoroki says; he grabs a piece of firewood to put into the stove. “You doing alright?”

Izuku nods, helping Todoroki with the firewood. “Yeah, better now, thanks,” he says. “I’ve been...thinking, recently. About Kouta.”

Todoroki’s face doesn’t change. He tosses another piece of firewood into the stove. “What about him?”

“I talked to Mandalay about him, after I brought him back when he fell off the wall,” Izuku answers. They run out of firewood to load, and Izuku settles his hands in his lap and looks down at them. “His parents, the Water Horses...they were killed in the line of duty.”

Todoroki flinches, his finger inches away from setting the firewood ablaze. “That’s…”

“It’s why he hates heroes,” Izuku says, shaking his head. “I...I wanna help him, or just reach out and say something, but...I don’t know what to do. What would you do if you were me, Thermostat?”

Todoroki pauses a long moment.

"...It depends," he says, setting a single finger ablaze and letting the flames eat away at the firewood. "If words alone are able to sway him against his convictions, then I don't think he was very convicted in the first place. If you want to tell him something, and if you want him to listen, you'd be better off *showing* him with your actions."

Izuku takes this in. It makes sense.

"At the same time, though." Todoroki pushes himself to his feet, and Izuku does the same shortly thereafter. "Sticking your nose into delicate situations like this isn't always the best thing to do, so you might not want to get involved unnecessarily." He pauses a moment, pondering. *"...Although,* considering who I'm talking to, I'm not sure that's an option."

"Hey," Izuku swats him lightly on the shoulder, "rude."

Todoroki rolls his eyes. "You and I both know how you are, Midoriya," he says. "Just don't push it, alright? You can try talking to him, sure, but don't keep at it if he doesn't want to listen. At that point, actions speak louder than words ever could."

"Yeah, you're right. Thanks, Thermostat. My head's clearer now."

"Anytime."

"HEY, YOU TWO!" Iida hollers from across the cookout area. "ALL HANDS ON DECK! YOU CAN HELP KAMINARI PREPARE THE BROTH!"

"PLEASE HELP ME GUYS I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE HECK I'M DOING."

"Coming!" Todoroki calls back over his shoulder, then turns to Izuku briefly. "Good luck, Spearmint."

"Thanks, I'm gonna need it."

He catches Kouta sneaking away from the campgrounds later on while he and his classmates are sitting down eating dinner. Izuku watches him go from the table; the sun is setting, and the sky is nearly dark, but he can make out Kouta's figure very clear as he moves into the trees and soon out of sight.

On impulse, Izuku gets to his feet, grabs an extra bowl of curry, and

makes to follow. Howler bounds close behind.

Izuku follows Kouta through the forest, then up a small little trail along the face of a mountain. The trail is small and almost precarious, and if Izuku hadn't been following Kouta, he wouldn't have noticed it at all.

The trail leads to a flat, stone plateau with an impressive, deadly drop-off, and Izuku stands back and watches as Kouta heads to the edge of the cliff and sits down, danging his feet over the side.

Izuku takes in a breath. The bowl of curry is hot in his hands.

"Kouta?"

Kouta jumps and springs to his feet, spinning around to face Izuku. When he realizes just what this means, he lowers his head. His balled fists shake at his sides.

"...You followed me here," Kouta bites out between his clenched teeth. "I told you I don't want anything to do with you or your hero friends! People like you are the worst kinds of people in the world, don't you know!?"

Izuku swallows hard. "Kouta, I—I'm sorry."

Kouta exhales heavily, but his teeth are still gritted. "What?"

"I'm sorry," Izuku says, looking at the ground, "about what happened to your parents."

He hears Kouta's sharp intake of breath, but doesn't raise his head to meet his eyes. "...Mandalay told you," Kouta seethes, and his voice cracks near the end.

Izuku swallows again, but the lump in his throat won't go away. "...Yeah, she told me," he says. "What happened to your parents, it...I know the world praised them for it, and they saved a lot of people, but...their deaths, they weren't…"

"I don't want to die."

"I did my best. Guess it wasn't enough, though, huh?"

"I'm sorry, Aki. I'm leaving you with all this…"

"I'm sorry, Sensei. ...I'm sorry, Dai."

"...Please...there's so much more I want to do, there's so much more I want to be. I don't want it to end. Please. I don't want—"

"You'll win?" "...I'll try my damndest."

"...Their deaths weren't a good thing," Izuku says thickly. "Their deaths...even though they saved so many people...they shouldn't have died. They *shouldn't have."*

Kouta says nothing.

"...And I think it makes perfect sense why you'd be bitter towards heroes," Izuku goes on slowly, "so I won't try to change your mind. Just...remember that your parents loved you, Kouta."

Kouta clicks his tongue, and it's only now that Izuku looks at his face. The boy's eyes shine with tears, but his fists are still balled, and his teeth are still gritted. With a roll of his eyes, he sits down near the cliffside again, face turned away from Izuku.

When he speaks, his voice breaks. "They didn't love me enough, apparently."

The words strike Izuku somewhere deep, but he doesn't refute them or respond. Instead, he takes in a deep breath, then starts forward and sets the bowl of curry on the ground near Kouta.

"I brought you some, since you missed dinner," Izuku explains, rising to his feet again. "We made it in a rush and we were all exhausted, so it's not as good as the Pussycats', but I wanted to bring you some anyway."

Kouta doesn't move or speak, which doesn't surprise him. Izuku whistles for Howler, and although Howler seems torn, he eventually goes with Izuku back to the campgrounds.

The following evening brings their first real joint-activity with Class 1-B: a test of courage set in one of the larger forests on the campgrounds. The test of courage is simple, really: they'll divide the students into teams, have a few teams go in to scare, and a couple other teams go in to try not to get scared. Izuku has no idea what any of this has to do with training and bettering themselves, but he supposes it'll be good stealth practice, if nothing else.

The groups are divided; not evenly, of course, as Monoma from Class

1-B and a couple from Class 1-A are stuck with extra classes for the duration of the exercise, so Izuku is paired with Tiger, simply because he has no one else to be with. It doesn't bother him; Tiger is a hero worthy of his title, so there's a lot Izuku can learn by working with him.

"Hey, Midoriya, I've got a question," Satou says, turning to him as the teams are gathering together, ready to begin. "Your eyes, can you actually see in the dark or…?"

Izuku shakes his head. "They work kind of like faint flashlights, though, so I can read in the dark," he says. "But I don't have night vision, or anything like that."

"Oh," Satou says, cupping his chin in his hand. "That makes sense…"

"Hold on a moment," Yaoyorozu says, turning to him. "Midoriya, wasn't your dog here a little while ago?"

"What?" Izuku frowns, then looks around. Howler *had* been standing with him a little while ago, but he's gone now. *"…Huh,"* Izuku frowns, straightening up. "That's kind of weird. He usually doesn't leave my side unless I tell him to…"

"I'm sure he'll return," Iida assures with a smile. "Perhaps he went to go cheer up the failed students. He'll be back in no time, I'm sure of it."

Izuku nods, but he can't shake his concern. Howler has wandered off before; he'd hunted Todoroki down at his hotel room back when Izuku was in the hospital, and back then it'd been fine, but still. Something doesn't feel right.

Half the students pour into the forest early on to prepare their scares and the other half of the students wait outside to prepare for their doom. Once the stage is set, two by two, the remaining students make their way into the forest.

Everything is fine for a while. Izuku travels with Tiger, Iida, and Satou, their two groups having yet to split up. They're heading down the assigned pathway, into the forest. Izuku isn't scared; if anything, he's excited for his own turn to be the scarer rather than the scared. Considering his Quirk, there's a lot he could do with it.

And then, Izuku is almost physically yanked forward by something in his chest. Iida notices before anyone else, reaching out and taking his

shoulder.

“Midoriya? What is it? What’s wrong?”

Izuku can’t answer. The tightness in his chest is spreading to his throat until he’s having trouble breathing, and the ex-holders are talking, too, saying things like *holy crap* and *I can feel it, too,* and if *they* can feel it…

“Premonition,” Izuku manages to gasp out; Satou and Tiger are both turned towards him now as well as Iida, concerned. “Right when something bad’s about to happen, sometimes—”

A long, grating scream splits the air like a chainsaw, and Izuku’s head whips around in that direction. The scream shouldn’t mean anything; people have been screaming left and right for the past while now, considering scaring each other is *literally* the point of this training session, but this scream is different. *This* scream has a high level of pain associated with it. Coupled with the yank and pull at Izuku’s chest, there’s only one explanation.

“Stay behind me,” Tiger says, swinging an arm out in front of them. “Let’s move.”

Wordlessly, the students nod, and the group advances towards the source of the scream.

Kouta has his knees drawn up against his chest and his arms wrapped around them tightly. The wind bites into his skin, cold but not unbearable, and he stares off into space, at the canopy of trees below, then at the lights of the main building a little farther off.

He hears a rustle nearby and immediately scowls. “If you’re back again,” he says, turning, “I’m gonna—”

It’s not Midoriya. It’s his dog.

Kouta grits his teeth and jerks his head away. “Why are you here?”

The dog crosses the plateau toward him.

“Go away. I don’t want you here. I don’t want anyone here.”

The dog sits beside him innocently, nose poised towards the horizon, so he’s following Kouta’s gaze. Out of the corner of his eye, Kouta catches the dog’s name tag that reads *H O W L E R,* along with a

secondary name tag written with a block of print so small Kouta can't make it out.

Kouta bites his lip and squeezes his legs tighter. "...Go away, Howler."

Howler bumps his nose against Kouta's cheek gently. Kouta wants to push him away, really, he does, but he can't bring himself to. Not now.

"...So you're just gonna stay no matter what I say, right?"

Howler responds by knocking his snout against Kouta's shoulder, and this time, Kouta reaches out and threads his fingers through the dog's thick coat. There's something oddly comforting about it.

Pixie-bob is unconscious in the clearing. A villain has his foot settled on the side of her head to keep her pinned there, and blood runs down the side of her face from a nasty gash on her temple. Another villain notices the new arrivals and raises their head in that direction.

"Oh," the villain says, smiling, "new company. How—"

Mandalay dashes from the other side of the forest and tackles the villain to the ground.

"Go, get out of here!" Mandalay barks, fists flying, legs moving nimbly. "Tiger, help me!"

Tiger is already advancing, and Izuku doesn't realize he's taken a step forward until Iida's fingers snake around his wrist. When Izuku turns towards him, Iida's eyes bear into his.

"Midoriya, we have to get back to the facility," Iida says. He isn't panicking, but his voice is firm, and Izuku can hear the urgency in it. "All we'll do here is get in their way and risk becoming a liability, we have to move."

Izuku *hates* it, but he nods. If they can get back to the facility, they can warn Aizawa, and on the way there, they'll be able to spread the word to whatever students they pass.

Izuku nods, trusts that Mandalay and Tiger will be able to hold off the villains, and turns with Iida and Satou away from the clearing.

Except, Izuku remembers something. His feet skid across the dirt, and his eyes go wide as the realization hits him.

Kouta—

“There’s something I have to do,” Izuku says; ahead of him, Iida and Satou stop and turn, eyes mirroring Izuku’s own. “Go ahead without me, I’ll meet up with you guys soon.”

“Hey, man, this isn’t the time to be acting heroic,” Satou says, and his voice wavers. “We’ve gotta run now and get help before it’s too late.”

“I *know,”* Izuku says, balling his fists, “but, that boy, Kouta, he’s—he’s all alone somewhere. I need to get to him before it’s too late and bring him back to the facility.”

Iida opens his mouth immediately to object, but in the end, he says nothing. Rather, he snaps his teeth together, grits them, and when he opens his eyes again, there’s something fierce in them that hadn’t been there before.

“Midoriya,” he says, “if something happens—”

“I know, it won’t,” Izuku promises, unsure of whether or not he means it right now. He’s more worried about getting to Kouta as soon as possible. “I won’t do anything stupid, I promise you. I’ll get Kouta and meet you back at the facility, won’t even take me ten minutes.”

It doesn’t convince Iida, he knows it doesn’t, but Iida holds his gaze for a long moment, then nods regardless.

“Ten minutes,” he repeats. “After that, I’m going to look for you.”

Izuku nods and, without waiting another moment, fires up One For All and takes off into the forest. Iida and Satou go the opposite way.

“Kiddo—”

“I can’t talk right now,” Izuku interrupts, leaping over a fallen tree and rolling upon landing. He gets his feet underneath him again and keeps running, faster. “If it comes down to it, can I count on you guys to support me in a fight?”

Silence.

“Only if it comes down to it,” Aki says at long last.

“Yeah,” Dai agrees. *“If you need help, we’re here to support you, all of us. Just…don’t do anything that’ll intentionally put yourself in that situation. You can’t keep us summoned for long without physical repercussions,*

remember?"

"Yeah, I remember," Izuku answers, nodding, and he runs faster than ever, heart pounding in time with his feet as they slam into the ground. "Only if it comes down to it, then."

Please, don't let it come down to it.

Don't.

The yank and pull in his chest sings a different tune.

Howler's ears twitch, and the dog leaps to his feet and turns towards the path leading up the side of the mountain. Kouta hugs his knees tighter, eyes burning.

"So you're leaving anyway?" he questions, and he doesn't know why but if Howler leaves now, he'll feel seriously attacked and hurt. He doesn't want Howler to leave, despite what he'd demanded before. "Just go, then, see if I—"

Howler growls lowly, and Kouta jumps, scrambling to his feet and backing away on instinct. He notices, a second later, that Howler hadn't been growling at him.

"Hey, kid."

Kouta raises his head towards where Howler is looking. A tall, burly figure of a man dressed in a black cloak steps off the path and onto the plateau. Howler's growling only grows louder and more fierce, but it doesn't bother Kouta this time. Howler is trying to protect him.

"That's a pretty cool hat you've got there," the stranger says, stepping towards them. Howler takes a step back, positioning himself closer to Kouta but still in between the boy and the man. "How attached are you to it, huh?"

Kouta's hand snaps up without him letting it, and his fingers grip the brim of the hat. "M-My dad, he…"

"Oh, so it's sentimental, is it?"

Howler's growling is becoming louder and more fierce, and Kouta grabs a fistful of the dog's fur, hands trembling.

"Bah, don't worry, kid."

The villain finally raises his head, and the shadow over his face lifts just enough for Kouta to see his eyes. One real, one mechanical.

“You won’t have any more sentiments once you’re dead, anyway.”

He raises a fist. Kouta buries both hands into Howler’s fur now, squeezing his eyes shut to prepare himself for the blow, and Howler snarls and holds his ground.

Something slams into Kouta. It isn’t a fist, it isn’t a blow; he’s knocked to the side, and he rolls over twice before stilling. Howler is there immediately, licking Kouta’s face until the boy pushes himself onto his elbows and then to his feet.

The kid from before—Midoriya Izuku, the one who’d brought Kouta curry, the one who’d spoken words to him that he’d never heard before, the one Kouta had punched for no good reason other than that he could and that he was bitter—is standing where Kouta and Howler had been moments ago.

The villain’s fist is still poised in the air ready to strike, but he hesitates. “Well, well, well, what do you know,” he says, lowering his arm back down to his side. “This is my lucky day after all, then, ain’t it? Runnin’ into *you* of all people…”

Midoriya glares. “Howler, keep him back,” he says without looking away from the villain, and Howler moves to stand before Kouta again protectively. Kouta doesn’t object.

The villain rolls his eyes with an amused but grotesque grin. “Pft, as if your little *canine* can save him,” he says, stepping forward. Midoriya doesn’t falter. “I’ve got my orders to keep *you* alive, but Shigaraki said nothin’ about *that* kid.”

Midoriya’s eyes flicker over to Kouta, and Kouta doesn’t think he’s ever seen someone look more fierce and dangerous.

“If you wanna get to him,” Midoriya tells the villain, voice holding steady, “then you’re going to *have* to kill me first.”

The villain lets out a longsuffering sigh. “C’mon, kid, you don’t wanna make me go against orders, do ya?” he says, taking a step forward, but something in his tone makes it obvious that he doesn’t care about his orders. “I’m already on the nose here. Do you have *any idea* how badly I wanna rip you to pieces?”

Midoriya takes a step back. “Well, I do now.”

The villain takes another step forward. “Don’t get cocky now,” he says; Howler presses against Kouta’s knees, pushing him further away. The villain doesn’t pay them any mind, focused entirely on Midoriya. “If you aren’t careful, you’re gonna piss me off. Just let me kill the kid, and I’ll take you back to Shigaraki without layin’ a hand on ya. How does that sound, huh? A compromise?”

Midoriya swallows, but moves his fists in front of his face anyway. His glare doesn’t falter. “It’s like I said,” he says lowly. “I’m not going to let you kill Kouta, no matter what.”

The villain doesn’t look disappointed. If anything, he seems more excited than ever. “Guess we’re doing this the hard way,” he says.

He slams his fist into the ground, and Midoriya is blasted back off his feet. Rocks and debris fly in all directions; Kouta swings his arms up in front of his face on instinct, and Howler ducks his head for a moment. Midoriya hits the ground tumbling, his back finally meeting resistance against the side of the mountain.

The villain advances, grinning. “Shigaraki made me swear not to kill you,” he says, “but he didn’t say I couldn’t rough ya up a little.”

Midoriya pushes himself up on his hands and knees, blood streaking down the side of his face. “I don’t care what you do to me,” he says, getting his feet underneath him and rising up slowly. “As long as I’m alive, I’m not letting you lay a finger on Kouta.”

If anything, this just makes the villain’s smile grow. “Pretty damn bold of you to say, kid!” he sneers, continuing forward. “Don’t you know who you’re up against? Against me, you don’t stand a *chance!”*

Midoriya swallows hard, teeth gritted, but he says nothing. He kicks off the ground, golden tendrils spreading through his skin, and he runs and leaps at the villain as soon as he’s close enough.

Kouta sees it a moment before it happens. The villain reaches out, and his fingers close around Midoriya’s balled fist as he swings in for a punch. Midoriya snaps his teeth together, and the villain squeezes his hand and flings him up against the mountainside.

Izuku’s head is full of cotton, and now, his ears and eyes are full of blood. He hits the ground on his side and lays there gasping for

breath, every inch of him burning. He's fairly certain the villain (Muscular, that's his name—Izuku recognized him from a criminal file he'd seen on the news so many years ago) broke several of his fingers when he'd squeezed his hand, but he brushes off the pain for the time being.

He doesn't have time to be in pain right now.

Muscular is advancing again, and Izuku pushes himself to his feet, though he staggers this time. "Y'know, I was so excited about beating ya into the ground that I almost forgot," Muscular says, grinning. "Tell me, where's that Bakugou kid, huh? You know where he is?"

Izuku doesn't let his shock show on his face. "Why would I know? Who's asking?"

"It's a yes or no question," Muscular says, and he's close now, just a few strides away. His loosely held fists sway at his sides. "Do you know where he is or nah? 'Cause if you don't, knockin' you out would be a piece of cake. And I wouldn't have to worry about Shigaraki whining at me for not getting information outta ya."

Izuku doesn't answer. The pain in his hand and head is getting hard to ignore, and stars dance before his line of sight.

"Can I put ya down for a no, then?" Muscular asks, and he doesn't give Izuku the chance to respond; he swings his fist, and Izuku barely has the chance to dodge. Muscular's knuckles smash into the mountainside, and the shockwave blasts Izuku off his feet again and sends him slamming into the ground.

"Whoops, almost gotcha there!" Muscular says, grinning widely. "Y'know what, I think I'm actually starting to like you, Midoriya! It's always fun when the victims have a little *spunk!"*

Izuku runs and leaps. Muscular doesn't flinch.

"Nice try," he says, raising a fist, "but it's not going to work!" He throws the punch, and Izuku throws one of his own with Full Cowl. The wind pressure created by Izuku is nothing compared to that of Muscular's hit, and Izuku is blown backwards again, hitting the ground and rolling twice before coming to a stop.

He coughs to clear his throat from blood, bile and dust, then pushes himself to his feet, staggering. The pain in his head is making it hard for him to think, and his spirit is completely grounded to his body. He

couldn't leave it now if he tried.

So.

"What do you want?" Izuku spits, stepping backwards as Muscular advances. He can't do much, but he can stall. Maybe someone will find them. "What's your reason for being in the League? What does Shigaraki want with me and Bakugou?"

"Pft, like I give a damn," Muscular says without breaking a stride. "I'm only here 'cause I wanna be able to kill whoever I want. I'm in it for the violence."

Stalling isn't working. He's still coming.

"I'll be honest, though, not being able to kill ya is kinda pathetic," Muscular says, shaking his head. "The power of my Quirk is so strong that not even my *skin* can contain it, but what's the point if I don't get to go all out, huh?"

Izuku's eyes flicker over to where Kouta and Howler stand. Kouta's eyes are wide, but he's staring off into space rather than at the battle before them. Howler looks frightened, but he doesn't move from his position.

If I can stall for time, then, maybe…

Izuku kicks off the ground and fires up One For All.

"Kouta, run!" he shrieks, feet pounding the ground, half his stomach in his throat. "Get out of here while you still can, I'll hold him off!"

Kouta doesn't move, not even when Howler tugs on his sleeve or tries dragging him off.

Muscular grins. "You're still worried about that *brat?"* he snarks. "Don't worry, I'll have plenty of time to deal with him, too! Just as soon as you stay *down—!"*

There's nothing Izuku can do against him. He can't block, he can't retaliate, he can't dodge. All he can do is take the hit and stall.

Muscular's shin connects with Izuku's stomach, and Izuku is slammed into the mountainside again. His head takes most of the impact, and his cry of shock is swallowed up by his sharp intake of breath. He crumples to the ground, choking on dust and bile.

“Hey, kid—KID!”

“Oy, boyo, if you don’t get up now he’s gonna kill you—!”

“Midoriya, buddy, you’ve gotta move!”

“Move, kiddo!”

“Get up!”

“You can do this, come on!”

“We believe in you!”

“Do it for your the people who love you!”

Izuku opens his eyes, slowly. Muscular’s silhouette, blurry through Izuku’s fuzzy vision, comes into view.

“You done yet?” Muscular asks, punching a fist into his open palm. “‘Cause I’m sure as hell ready for another round.”

A rock flies out of nowhere and smacks Muscular in the back of the head.

Muscular turns first; Izuku follows his gaze. Kouta stands a little ways away, eyes wide, hand outstretched.

Kouta…

“I’ll get to you in a second!” Muscular barks. “Why don’t you wait your turn like a good little boy, huh?”

“Tell me something!” Kouta shouts, and his voice cracks on the last syllable. “The Water Horses. My m-mom and dad, d-did—did you torture them like that before you killed them!?”

…The Water Horses…

Muscular hesitates. “Wait, you’re their *kid?”* he questions, amusement clear in his tone. “Well, damn, wouldn’t you know it! Guess this is *fate,* ain’t it?”

He takes another step towards Kouta. Izuku can’t move. Howler growls.

“Y’know, I was never pissed at the Water Horses,” Muscular says,

“even after they wrecked my eye beyond repair. But, y’know somethin’? I couldn’t *believe* how completely *weak* they were, even as a hero duo.”

Kouta’s hands begin to shake. “D-Don’t—”

“Pretty pathetic, actually!” Muscular barks, smiling wider. “They died screaming, didn’t you know? They died *crying,* and honestly, it makes me laugh! They were all confident, spewing heroic bullshit that they couldn’t live up to. You should’ve seen it, kid! Or…”

Muscular pauses, and when his smile comes back, it’s more twisted than ever.

“…*Did* you?”

Izuku fires up One For All and lunges.

Muscular catches him by the forearm and holds him there, letting him dangle. Izuku kicks and struggles, but when Muscular’s fingers clamp down hard on his forearm, he has to bite his lip to keep from crying out.

“Wow, jeez, are you serious?” Muscular asks, but his smile only widens and becomes more fiendish. “And here I was thinking you were down for good! Count me impressed! If Shigaraki wasn’t so hell-bent on getting you alive, I’d love to see how far you could last against me!”

He swings Izuku by the arm and slams him into the ground. Izuku coughs and chokes, but gets to his feet and charges as soon as he can.

He barely gets two steps before Muscular blasts him off his feet again with a punch.

Izuku rolls twice, but gets his feet underneath him again and runs. Muscular kicks, and the wind pressure sends him flying backwards. His ankle tweaks when he lands and skids, but he doesn’t stop. There’s blood running down his face, and he can’t see through his left eye anymore, but it doesn’t matter. He’ll have to make do with impaired depth perception.

He runs again. He’s blown back off his feet. He relives every feeling he’s ever felt during those death dreams, where he’d seen the past holders in predicaments not unlike this one. It doesn’t matter how many times he gets up and tries, it doesn’t matter how many times he

runs and leaps. Muscular will always have the upper hand.

Muscular seems to read this on his face, when Izuku staggers and shifts his feet into a fighting stance but doesn't attack directly. "That look in your eyes," Muscular says, stepping forward. "You're scared to death of me, aren't you?"

Izuku says nothing.

"Y'know, it'd be *peachy* if you'd just go ahead and lemme kill the kid," Muscular says. "As entertaining as this is, I'm not sure how much longer I can hold back on ya, 'specially when you're being so heroic and obnoxious. So why not just throw in the towel, huh? No matter how hard you try, you're not gonna beat me."

This is when Izuku realizes it, though. For some reason, Muscular's words bring back a lot of memories, a lot of feelings he'd felt that didn't belong to him, a lot of trains of thought that he'd heard but didn't create.

No matter how hard I try, huh?

"...Maybe you're right," Izuku says, and then, he stops. "No, actually, you're *definitely* right. In strength, in experience, with your Quirk...you're superior to me in every way. Fighting me like this...we both know I don't stand a chance."

"Exactly!" Muscular says, nodding enthusiastically. "So—"

"But I don't think it matters whether or not I stand a chance," Izuku says, not just for Muscular, but for himself, too. "It doesn't matter if I can beat you. It doesn't matter if trying is pointless. What *does* matter, though...is that I *do* try."

He sees something flicker in Kouta's eyes, there one moment and gone the next. In front of him, Muscular sighs.

"And here I was thinkin' I'd finally knocked some sense into ya," he says, shaking his head. "Guess we'll have to try again, aye, Wipeout Boy?"

With confidence he doesn't have, Izuku grins. "You can break my body," he says, firing up One For All, "but you *can't* break my spirit!"

He runs, and leaps, and he knows the punch is coming before Muscular even pulls back his fist. He feels it, the blow sending white-

hot pain blossoming across his chest and making the pounding in his head go up a notch. When he hits the ground, he barely feels it, so hyped and pumped with adrenaline that all he can do is get to his feet and charge again.

His vision blurs with tears and pain, and black splotches dance before his sight, but he doesn't falter. He's fairly certain he's going to start overusing One For All and breaking his limbs now that he can't focus, not that it matters.

He runs again, but he has to drop One For All early, and his vision goes completely black while his knees buckle. Fingers dig into his hair and drag him, pulling him upright, and as though from far away, he hears a voice.

"This is just pathetic now, boy. Stay *down."*

Muscular slams his head into the dirt.

"Stop it! Let him go!"

Except, when Izuku comes to, it's to Kouta's voice, shrieked and frantic and desperate. Izuku opens his eyes slowly, barely cracking them; he sees Muscular first, a towering silhouette, and then Kouta second, standing with his arms outstretched, water dripping from his hands.

"He ain't dead, kid," Muscular says, starting towards him. "Just takin' a little dirt nap. You won't have to worry about him for much longer, anyway."

Izuku's brain begins to tick again, slowly. *Water…*

Kouta…

…Water…?

…Water…

Water—!

With strength he doesn't have, Izuku grabs ahold of his own spirit—pinned down by pain—and *yanks.*

The villain is coming closer. Howler is growling and snarling and

moving backwards, forcing Kouta back too. The villain's smile is wide and toothy, and when Kouta's shoulderblades press into the mountainside, he feels an overwhelming sense of hopelessness and dread.

Midoriya won't move. His body is completely still, blood pooling beneath his head, and Kouta knows he isn't dead, but all he can see when he looks at Midoriya is an image of his parents projected onto him. All he can think of is Muscular's crazed eyes and deranged smile as he takes one step after another towards him, closer, closer—

"Get up!" Kouta finds himself screaming as the tears break free and Howler crouches, ready to lunge. *"Please, get up!"*

Nothing happens. Muscular grins. "Tell your precious Mommy and Daddy hello from me," he says, retracting his fist. "I'd love to see their reactions when they realized they couldn't protect their own son."

Kouta braces himself.

And then, something odd happens.

Muscular's fist comes up in front of his face, and he stumbles backwards, shaking his head feverishly. He looks around, to the left, to the right, to the sky. "What the hell?" he breathes, mirroring Kouta's thoughts. "Who—"

It happens again. Muscular swats at something by his face, shaking his head. Kouta sees Midoriya's body, motionless on the ground by the mountainside, so *who*—

Muscular makes an odd sound. A choked something of discomfort.

"Kouta, turn away! Don't look!"

It's Midoriya's voice, hollow and icy and not at all like it'd been a second ago, but Kouta buries his head into his arms and squeezes his eyes shut tightly. He hears a sound; a wet *something,* a shriek of pain (Muscular's shriek of pain), and he hears footsteps by him and raises his head again.

Midoriya is here, standing in front of Kouta and Howler defensively, but it's not the Midoriya Kouta knows. This Midoriya has an outline of electric green, like lineart in an incomplete drawing, and he looks visibly shaken up by something, breath coming in gasping heaves.

In front of them, Muscular is screaming and writhing, both hands covering his face as blood seeps between his fingers. It's now that Kouta realises Midoriya's hand is covered in blood.

"Here we go," Midoriya gasps out—and then, two figures fade in out of seemingly thin air, one on either side of him. One of them is a short, stocky woman with an outline of orange; the other is a tall, skinny man with an outline of gray.

Muscular jerks his hands down from his face. Kouta almost loses the curry from earlier. Muscular's left eye socket is bloody and empty; all that remains is his mechanical eye.

"You little shit, I'll kill you!" he roars, raising both fists into the air. "To hell with orders, you're gonna *pay!"*

"Kouta!" Midoriya strains, voice tight. "Can you make some more water?"

Kouta blinks. His hands are still wet from earlier, and regardless of how much he hates Quirks, he nods feverishly.

The man with the gray outline turns to him and smiles. "Thanks, boyo," he says. "Just keep us supplied. We'll take it from here."

Kouta doesn't know what's going on, but he nods and raises his hands.

Muscular runs at them, specifically at Midoriya, and Midoriya runs to meet him head-on, just like before. Kouta shuts his eyes for a moment, and a burst of water shoots from his hands. The orange-outlined woman swings her arm immediately; the water bends to her will, and when she has it gathered under her control, she thrusts out her arm and sends it at the villain.

The water freezes around the villain's ankles; he breaks out of it a second later, but it gives Midoriya just a big enough opening to leap and swing his leg at the villain's head. The villain sees him, grabs his leg, and flings him up against the mountainside. Midoriya hits the ground, but gets up a second later and runs.

"Yukō!" Midoriya shouts, teeth gritted. "Do it again!"

The strange man, Yukō, grins. "You got it!" he says, swinging his arm; the water on the ground rises to his will. "C'mon, Kibō, let's do this!"

"I'm right beside you, ojisan," the woman—Kibō—says, and she too

raises her hands. “If we can buy some more time—”

The water freezes around the villain’s ankles again. He breaks free, but it looks like the only thing it’s doing is making him angrier.

“One more time, kid!” Yukō says, back to Kouta but voice still directed at him. “One more time and we’ll take him down!”

Kouta doesn’t waste any more time. He wants it to be over. Howler nudges his leg, and that’s the last bit of encouragement he needs. Water bursts from his hands, and Yukō and Kibō take it immediately and get to work.

He watches them. Watches them bend the water, watches them freeze it around Muscular’s ankles, watches steam rise from it. Watches them bend it, watches them shout at and encourage each other, watches them battle.

And for a moment, it’s not two strangers he sees holding the villain at bay while Midoriya looks for an opening.

It’s his mother and father.

Yukō and Kibō swing their arms into the air simultaneously. Ice encases Muscular’s legs from his feet to his knees. Just before he breaks out of it, Midoriya leaps in out of nowhere with a jagged stone in his hand. His bloody hand.

Kouta sinks to his knees and buries his face in Howler’s fur. He hears a crack and a shriek, Muscular’s shriek again, but he doesn’t dare open his eyes. The ground trembles and lurches beneath him, almost throwing him off balance, but he clutches Howler tighter and doesn’t let go.

“Kouta!”

There’s a crack and a crash nearby. He opens his eyes. Midoriya is sprinting towards him, back to normal, blood running down the side of his face. Yukō and Kibō are gone. Behind Midoriya, Muscular thunders and howls with fury and pain.

Midoriya swings around in front of Kouta and kneels. The ground shakes and trembles, and Muscular storms forward blindly, shrieking and cussing.

“G-Get on my back!” Midoriya chokes. “We have to get out of here,

Kouta—!”

Kouta does what he’s told, leaping onto Midoriya’s back and wrapping his arms around his neck. Midoriya grits his teeth, clasps his hands together, and raises his arms above his head. Golden tendrils spread throughout his skin.

“Don’t let go, no matter what!” Midoriya demands, and he brings his fists down into the rocky plateau beneath them with an indistinguishable shout. The plateau splinters and cracks. The mountainside trembles. Midoriya grabs Howler under one arm and springs back. The ground crackles and crumbles; Muscular throws one final punch. The wind pressure blasts them backwards; Midoriya fires off his own blast in an attempt to counter Muscular’s blow, but it doesn’t do much.

They’re falling, and the mountainside crumbles and falls with them.

Chapter End Notes

> I really don't have much to say this time around other than I really hoped you guys enjoyed this and thank you all for your support regarding my surgery/stories and whatnot. I couldn't respond to all the comments this time around shdfksdf but thank you so much, your support means the world to me! :D
>
> I'm gonna try and get the next chapter out soon! I'm really excited to show y'all what I have planned for the rest of this story! :D
> Until next time, go beyond! PLUS ULTRA!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

The World Turned Upside Down

Chapter Summary

"Yorktown (The World Turned Upside Down)" from Hamilton

Chapter Notes

No art this time around, but huge thanks to all the artists who have done me things!! Enjoy the chapter! I've been lookig forward to this one for a long time. :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It isn't the *stupidest* thing Izuku has ever done, but either way, that doesn't change the fact that now, the entire mountainside is avalanching and he's freefalling with a border collie and a kid who's clinging to him so tightly it's beginning to cut off his oxygen.

While it may not be *the stupidest* thing he's ever done in bringing down the entire mountainside in a last ditch effort to keep Muscular back, the absurdity of the situation, coupled with the pain in his head and his dizzying shock and relief, still makes him want to laugh. Or scream.

The canopy of trees is coming at them fast, and Izuku ignores Kouta's screaming long enough to channel One For All and swing his leg. The wind pressure serves as a cushion to soften their fall, but it doesn't break it entirely. Izuku, Kouta, and Howler land in a treetop, and a couple snapping branches later, Izuku is face-down in a bush. Kouta is still clinging to Izuku's back, so at *least* he didn't take the brunt of the fall.

Izuku sits up slowly, and Kouta lets go of him. "You okay?" Izuku breathes.

"Yeah," Kouta answers back. He sounds thoroughly shaken, though, so Izuku isn't sure of how "okay" he actually is.

He hears a crack and a crash behind him and looks over his shoulder. Dust rises from the mountainside as the rocks splinter and avalanche, and Izuku swallows thickly and shuts his eyes, willing the pounding in his head to stop. His stomach is churning, and he feels sicker than he's ever felt before in his life, though he does his best not to let it show.

Howler landed in a bush nearby and has already recovered, and now he rushes over, frantically licking Izuku's face. Izuku takes in a sharp breath, then lets it go.

"I'm fine, I'm fine," Izuku lies, flicking a few leaves out of Howler's fur with his undamaged hand. The other one pulses in pain with his heartbeat, but he does his best to ignore it. "We should keep moving, we don't know where the others ended up. We need to get you back to the facility, too, Kouta."

Kouta swallows hard, but nods. "M-Midoriya, I—"

"If you can," Izuku interrupts, not to be rude but because he seriously doesn't know how long he's going to be conscious, "we could really use your Quirk. See that smoke?" He points with his undamaged hand at the smoke rising beyond the treetops. "We're trapped as long as that fire's going. Catch my drift?"

Kouta swallows again. "I do," he says, "but, Midori—"

"First, though, I really need to get you back to the facility," Izuku says, rising to his feet and swaying only sightly. "The sooner you're safe, the better—"

Kouta's arms snake around his legs, and he squeezes tight, his face buried in Izuku's stomach. Izuku's breath gets stuck in his throat for a moment, shoulders going tense, but then, he relaxes and settles his hand on Kouta's head.

"Yeah, okay, we'll…we'll just hang around here for a few minutes. But we have to get moving again soon."

Kouta nods shakily and doesn't let go.

"That was seriously insane," Kibo says, voice trembling. *"You should get your head checked out, sweetheart. That looked bad."*

Izuku swallows hard. He knows he has at least a minor concussion, and his ribs feel all out of sorts. Getting back to the campgrounds would be optimal, but he's not sure he'll be able to do that given the situation with Kouta.

"I'll think of something," Izuku murmurs, both to the ex-holders and to Kouta. "It'll be fine, I'll think of something."

"Hey, dude," Aki says, *"I don't know if this helps, but I have a wind*

Quirk, if there's something you can use that for."

"I'll keep that in mind," Izuku says, very quietly. Kouta doesn't hear him. "We'll talk more later about Quirks and stuff, just, for now—"

"Midoriya!"

Izuku's head snaps up, as does Kouta's. Aizawa sprints through the trees toward them, eyes carrying a mixture of urgency and relief.

"Aizawa-sensei," Izuku breathes, most of the tension leaving his shoulders. Kouta lets him go, and Izuku turns to face his teacher fully.

"Are you—" Aizawa starts, then stops when he gets close enough to see the blood on Izuku's head. "You got in a fight."

Izuku bites his lip. The chief of police's words come back to him in a rush. He'd been careful back at the mall in not using his Quirk against Shigaraki at the mall, but the situation here had been much more dire.

At long last, he raises his head. "I did what I needed to do to protect Kouta and stay alive," he says, looking Aizawa in the eye. "I didn't have any other choice."

Aizawa glances down at Kouta, then up at him again. Izuku doesn't give him the chance to speak.

"Kouta has a water Quirk," Izuku explains firmly but hastily. "He said he's willing to help put out the fires. We need to protect him at all cost."

Aizawa nods. "We'll go back to the facility," he determines in a voice that doesn't leave room for argument. "We need to get your head wrapped, too."

Izuku understands this, but won't accept it. "I can't," Izuku says, shaking his head. "Listen, there's—one of the villains, he said something. I need to tell Mandalay."

Aizawa actually *glares* at him. "Midoriya, not now. Don't be like this."

"I'm sorry," Izuku says, shaking his head again, "but I don't have time. I'll be careful, I swear, I just—I need to do this."

He can't bring himself to say it to Aizawa's face, that he and Bakugou are both targets of the League. If he tells Aizawa here, there's no way he'll let Izuku out of his sight.

Aizawa isn't convinced. "Midoriya—"

"I'll be careful, please," Izuku says, "I just, I—I really need to do this. I promise I'll be careful, just, please. Trust me."

"...Alright."

Izuku blinks. "What?"

"I said alright," Aizawa bites. He looks torn. "When you get to Mandalay, relay a message from me, too. Tell her to let the students know that from this point forward, they have my permission to defend themselves."

It slams into Izuku like a truck, this new information. This is the real game changer, here. If the students are actually able to legally fight back—

"I will," Izuku says, nodding. "I promise, I won't let you down."

"I know you won't," Aizawa says. "Just, don't do anything stupid, alright, Problem Child?"

Izuku should probably be insulted, but AIzawa's tone carries a certain kind of endearment. He smiles. "I'll do my best," he says. "Thank you."

Aizawa nods stiffly, and Izuku turns and kneels in front of Howler. Howler bounds up to him and bumps his nose against Izuku's cheek.

"Listen up," Izuku says, framing Howler's face with his hands. "You're gonna protect Kouta, alright? You're gonna go with him, and you aren't leaving him alone no matter what."

Howler bops his nose against Izuku's cheek again, and Izuku presses his forehead against the dog's.

"I know, but I'll be fine," Izuku says, smiling. "I promise I'll be fine, alright? You have to do this for me, Howler, please. I'm counting on you."

He pulls away and stands again, and Howler turns to Kouta with determination Izuku hadn't known was possible for a dog to show. When he thinks about it, Izuku reaches toward his neck; his bell is still very much there, and he's sure it's caked in blood and dust, but for now he doesn't think much of it. It's there, and that's all that matters.

Just as Izuku makes to leave, a hand tugs at his shirt. He turns; Kouta grits his teeth and looks down for a moment, but then, he raises his head and meets Izuku's eyes.

"Don't die," Kouta strains, and his eyes shimmer while his voice shakes.

Izuku grins. "Don't worry," he says. "If I was meant to die today, it would've happened by now. I'll be fine, I promise."

Kouta doesn't seem the least bit convinced, but he nods, and Izuku gives Aizawa one last meaningful look before turning and taking off into the forest. His head pounds, and every part of him is aching some way or another, but he ignores it. He doesn't have time for pain right now.

"Okay, let's talk Quirks," Izuku says, sprinting onwards. "Fill me in."

"Like I was saying, I've got a wind Quirk," Aki says. *"It wasn't very strong before One For All, though, so I don't know how useful it'll actually be now."*

"Noted," Izuku says with a short nod. "Next?"

"Quirkless," Dai says, *"but I'm pretty sure you already knew that."*

"You know mine and Kibo's," Yuko says, *"so I won't bother tellin' ya, boyo."*

"My Quirk was an enhancement to begin with, even before One For All," Nana says, *"so primarily, my Quirk is basically a dumbed down version of One For All."*

"FIRE, BABY!" Senshi shouts, so loudly that it actually seems to echo through Izuku's head. *"Mostly it's controlling fire, but I can produce it to an extent, too!"*

"Burn baby burn," Aki hums.

"Mine is obvious," Mirai says, *"so I won't even bother explaining."*

"Wait I forgot, what's your Quirk again?"

"You're kidding me, right. You're kidding me."

"Hey man, it's been a whi—oooohh, nevermind, now I remember. Ignore me, I'm an idiot."

“Ha, nice goin’ there, Patricia.”

“Bold words coming from literal Ocean Man.”

“I swear—”

The banter is both a blessing and a hindrance, because it’s a nice distraction against the pain, but at the same time, it’s also, well, a distraction. Izuku ignores it and plunges through the forest with renewed vigor, and he lets the spirits’ arguments become something of an anthem.

There’s been a horrible feeling in his chest ever since he first noticed it back during the beginning of their test of courage (heh, kinda ironic, considering their predicament now). The yank and tug hasn’t gotten any worse, but it hasn’t gotten better, either.

Our lives are at stake, Izuku thinks, gritting his teeth. *All of our lives are at stake here. Not just mine or Kouta’s, all of our lives.*

He follows the shouts and cries of war and bursts into the clearing. Mandalay and Tiger are still there fending off the villains; Pixie-bob is unconscious on the ground, unmoving with a streak of blood through her hair. The situation here hasn’t changed, but other things have.

“Kouta is safe!” Izuku shouts; Mandalay’s eyes flicker over to him for a moment, before she lands another punch to the villain’s face. “And I have a message from Aizawa-sensei!”

“Make it snappy!” Mandalay strains through gritted teeth. “And then get out of here, Midoriya!”

Aizawa carries Kouta and runs. Midoriya’s service dog runs right alongside him, keeping up with ease. Smoke fills the air and clouds the sky above them. The scent is thick in Aizawa’s nostrils and the smoke burns his eyes, so he does his best to keep his head down to little avail.

“S-Sir, I…” Kouta is clinging to him, arms wrapped tightly around his neck. His voice is thick with tears. “I-I don’t get it. I don’t *g-get it.* Even though I hated him, even though I hurt him, w-why did he—”

Aizawa takes in a long breath.

“I don’t want him to die,” Kouta chokes, and his voice breaks. “I-If he

dies now, it'll be *my fault—"*

"Midoriya isn't going to die today," Aizawa cuts in firmly, redoubling his pace. Howler keeps up. "You saw that look in his eyes, didn't you? When he's got his head set on something, there's nothing that can hold him back. After this is all over, make sure you tell him how you feel. If you can, try putting more into your thanks than your sorry. I'm sure he'd appreciate that."

Kouta sniffles, but nods against his shoulder.

"All students, attention! I have an important announcement for everyone!"

The voice comes from within his head, and Aizawa breathes a sigh of relief. Midoriya got to Mandalay safely, then. That's good.

"In the name of of Aizawa Shouta, you are hereby permitted to defend yourselves against the villains! Also, Bakugou Katsuki has been confirmed as one of the League's targets, so please, Bakugou, stay alert!"

Bakugou?

Aizawa grits his teeth behind his lips, worry bubbling in the pit of his stomach.

This isn't good...

Izuku probably should've mentioned that Bakugou wasn't the League's *only* target, but in his haste to give the message and get out of there, he'd completely forgotten. Besides, he's alone right now, and *he* knows he's one of the League's targets. That's really all that matters right now, considering he's alone—

He sees something out of the corner of his eye and dives out of the way not a second too soon. Something swings out of the shadows and takes down two trees; Izuku hits the ground with his hands covering his head, eyes shut and teeth gritted.

"The hell?"

"What was that?"

"Kid, move!"

Izuku scrambles to his feet and dodge to the left; something smashes into the ground where he'd been a second ago, shaking the forest

floor, and Izuku tumbles into the nearest bush and stays there, panting and gasping for breath.

He sees something shifting in the shadows, something massive and dark and it'd *definitely* attacked him deliberately. It must be some kind of a villain—

Something touches his arm, and he inhales sharply to scream. A hand clamps over his mouth a second later, stifling it.

"Don't say anything, Midoriya," a familiar voice hisses close to his ear. "He's attacking anything that moves, you can't make a sound."

The hand moves from his mouth, and Izuku gasps for a moment or two. "Shouji, *warn a guy,"* Izuku chokes out as loudly as he dares, so relieved he could cry. "We're all on edge here, could you maybe—y'know, *not grab me?"*

"I apologize," Shouji answers, but his head faces forward. "I should've thought before grabbing you."

Izuku takes in a breath, lets it go, and follows Shouji's gaze. "Who is it?" he asks, keeping his voice low. "A villain?"

"No," Shouji says at once, already shaking his head. "Tokoyami. Dark Shadow."

Izuku's train of thought screeches to a halt. *"Dark Sha—"*

Shouji clamps his hand over Izuku's mouth again and pushes the two of them further into the bushes. The looming dark figure from before *(Dark Shadow,* Izuku repeats to himself) hovers nearby them for a moment, then moves on and continues his search.

When he's sure he's gone, Izuku yanks Shouji's limb away from his face. *"You're gonna have to stop doing that."*

"Sorry," Shouji says, but by the tone of his voice, he doesn't really mean it. "Dark Shadow is attacking anything that moves or makes noise. We can't risk getting found out, not unless we have some kind of escape route."

Izuku nods. He remembers Tokoyami telling him about Dark Shadow and how, in dark, lightless places, Dark Shadow becomes restless and harder to control. Dark Shadow must have overpowered Tokoyami and taken the reigns, it's the only explanation.

“I heard the announcement,” Shouji murmurs, barely loud enough for Izuku to hear. “The villains are after Bakugou, right?”

“And me,” Izuku whispers back.

Shouji’s wide eyes find his. *“What?”*

“Yeah, I forgot to mention it to Mandalay,” Izuku says, unconcerned. “But don’t worry about it. The League doesn’t know where I am, and with Dark Shadow like this, I can’t imagine they’ll come anywhere *near* this area anytime soon. Bakugou, on the other hand…”

Shouji turns back towards the circling figure of Dark Shadow. “Guess this is where we hit a crossroad,” he says lowly. “Dark Shadow and Tokoyami are in a lot of trouble here, but you wanna get to Bakugou, don’t you?”

“I mean, not particularly,” Izuku says, “but it’d be *nice* to make sure he isn’t doing something stupid. For all we know, he could already be __”

A sudden explosion cuts him off. Dark Shadow’s head snaps up towards that direction, and Izuku and Shouji raise their heads. Smoke rises nearby, a couple treetops away. Dark Shadow lowers his head and continues circling, and Izuku and Shouji duck back into the bush to avoid being seen.

“That was definitely Bakugou,” Shouji says.

“Yeah, no question.”

“Now I’m torn.” Shouji glances upwards, then lowers his head back down and looks at Izuku. “I can’t leave Tokoyami here alone, not in the state he’s in. But, at the same time, that explosion probably meant that Bakugou is under attack. What do you wanna do?”

Izuku ponders this for a long moment.

“…Y’know,” he says, “I think I have a compromise.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah, but it’s really stupid.”

“We’re literally under attack by villains, Midoriya. I doubt it’ll be any worse than that. What do you have in mind?”

Izuku peeks his head over the bush. Dark Shadow lurks nearby, almost dangerously close. When he turns his head towards them, Izuku ducks into the bush again and smiles at Shouji.

“How do you feel about live bait?” Izuku asks.

Shouji stares at him. “...I redact my original statement, Midoriya. This is a terrible idea.”

“To be fair…” Izuku gets his feet beneath him, crouching, and grins wider. “It isn’t the stupidest thing I’ve ever done. And for what it’s worth, being a ghost is pretty dang cool.”

“Yes, well, I hope it doesn’t come down to that,” Shouji says, shaking his head. Despite his clear distaste to the plan, he, too, crouches. “Ready when you are.”

“Dammit!” Bakugou fires off another blast, one that the villain dodges with ease. “What’s with this guy!?”

The villain’s literal teeth, strong like metal and long like ribbons, shoot from the villain’s mouth; Shouto barely has time to throw up a wall of ice before they reach him. The teeth sinks into the ice harmlessly, and the villain retracts them and shoots them at Bakugou instead.

“You need to stop attacking,” Shouto says, swinging out an arm in Bakugou’s direction. “Going at him from the front isn’t working, we need some kind of a strategy if we’re gonna beat this guy—”

“I get it, IcyHot!” Bakugou snaps, but he fires off another blast at the villain anyway, one that is again dodged easily. “Dammit, it’s hard enough just keeping him back! How the hell are we supposed to come up with a plan, huh!?”

Shouto has no idea. That’s what scares him. “We just have to keep—”

“HEY, THERMOSTAT!”

Shouto throws up a wall of ice in front of the villain again, then spins around. Midoriya and Shouji are sprinting towards them from the nearby forest; Shouji’s eyes are set forward, urgent and terrified, and Midoriya is grinning, though that might be scarier.

“Give us some light!” Midoriya hollers.

Shouto blinks.

And then the trees behind Midoriya and Shouji splinter and crack and topple to the ground, and then emerges the roaring, gigantic form of Dark Shadow.

There's a beat, a moment.

"Bakugou!" Shouto shouts, sprinting back. "Dodge!"

Bakugou leaps to the left, and Shouto leaps to the right. Midoriya and Shouji dive in opposite directions, and Dark Shadow barrels into the fray. The villain shoots long, jagged teeth, strong as metal, at Dark Shadow, but that's all he has the chance to do before Dark Shadow retaliates. The villain is thrown up against the side of a tree, and he slides to the ground and lays there in an unmoving heap.

That's over with, but now they have a bigger problem. Dark Shadow lifts his head and lets out a monstrous roar towards the sky, and Shouto gets his feet underneath him again.

"Bakugou, now!" Shouto yells, leaping from his position with his left hand ablaze. Bakugou flanks Dark Shadow on the opposite side, hands crackling with explosions.

Dark Shadow shrieks and writhes, but it's over quickly. Moments later, Tokoyami sits on the ground, gasping, and Shouto and Bakugou stand on either side of him doing the same.

"I'm sorry," Tokoyami pants, shaking his head. "That was my fault for losing control…"

"You single handedly took out the villain Bakugou and I had been struggling with since the start of this whole thing," Shouto says, turning to him. "It worked out in the end, I think."

"Hey, you're alive!"

Shouto turns; Midoriya and Shouji sprint up to them, Midoriya in the lead. There's blood on the side of Midoriya's head and another streak that goes right over his eye, but other than that, he seems unharmed. Shouji fares likewise; one of his limbs is sprouting a nasty gash, but that's all.

"I'm glad you're alright," Shouto says, first to Midoriya before raising his head to Shouji. "This entire situation is pretty unbelievable..."

Midoriya nods, the movement small. “Yeah, kinda,” he says, “but either way, we have to deal with it. Speaking of which, Bakugou.”

Bakugou’s head snaps up. This is the first time Midoriya has tried talking to him since the final exams. “What do you want?” Bakugou growls.

“Don’t give me that,” Midoriya snaps, then turns back to Shouto. “You heard the announcement, right? From Mandalay?”

Shouto nods. “It’s the only reason we started fighting back in the first place,” he says, looking down at his hand. There’s still frost on his fingertips. “The villains are after Bakugou, right?”

Midoriya nods.

“Midoriya also tastefully forgot to mention that the League is targeting him as well,” Shouji interjects, frowning. “You know. Typical.”

“I seriously just forgot,” Midoriya says when Shouto opens his mouth, and he shakes his head. “And either way, it doesn’t matter much. We’re stronger in numbers, and now that we’re all together like this, we should be able to keep the League from getting to us, don’t you think?”

“If it comes down to it and we don’t have another choice,” Tokoyami says, getting to his feet slowly, “I could give Dark Shadow the reins again. It might do more harm than good, but it would give you all time to get to a safer place, at least. Besides, I don’t see anyone overpowering Dark Shadow when he’s on a rampage.”

It’s true, Shouto has to admit. He glances at the villain, unconscious on the ground, then turns back to Midoriya. “We’ll form ranks,” he says. “You and Bakugou will walk in the middle, Shouji will walk in the back, and me and Tokoyami will take the front.”

Midoriya opens his mouth immediately, thinks better of it, then sighs. “You’re right, you’re right,” he says, shaking his head. “Yeah, let’s form ranks.”

“HEY!” Bakugou screeches furiously, “I DON’T NEED ANY BODYGUARDS—!”

Midoriya looks him in the eye. “Bakugou?”

“WHAT!?”

“Shut up, please.”

“You *little—*”

“Enough,” Tokoyami cuts in, making to step between Midoriya and Bakugou should need be. “We’re already dealing with the enemy, we don’t need to be fighting amongst each other as well. Whatever’s going on between the two of you, settle it later, not on the battlefield. Alright?”

Bakugou glares, and Midoriya glares back, but they say nothing else to each other.

“Fine,” Bakugou hisses, turning away sharpy. “Let’s form the frickin’ ranks. No one’s being my bodyguard, though.”

Nothing more is said on the matter. Shouto and Tokoyami take the front while Shouji stands at the back, and Midoriya and Bakugou make up the middle. They neither look at nor talk to each other.

Tenya has been pacing the floor for the past ten minutes.

“He should be back by now,” Tenya says, turning toward Kirishima. “He said he’d be back in ten minutes and he’s not. I have to go look for him.”

“No one’s going anywhere,” Blood King says, uncrossing his arms and stepping forward. “We’re under attack. I get you wanna do whatever you can to help your classmates, but the worst thing you could do right now is go out there and put yourself in danger.”

Tenya hates it. He hates that Blood King is *right*.

The door swings open, and in rushes Aizawa, carrying Kouta, and Howler hot on his heels. Aizawa sets Kouta down on the floor, and Howler is on him immediately, licking his face and hands in an obvious attempt to comfort him. Kouta doesn’t react to any of it.

“Aizawa-sensei,” Tenya says immediately, approaching. Kaminari, Sero, and Kirishima are right behind him, worried. “What’s going on? Where’s Midoriya?”

“He was the one who relayed the message to Mandalay,” Aizawa says sharply.

Tenya’s train of thought blanks for a second. “He *what?”*

“You heard me,” Aizawa says. “Midoriya relayed the message to Mandalay. He’ll be back soon.”

No, this isn’t okay. Something feels wrong. He doesn’t like this at all. “Let me go look for him,” Tenya says, starting forward. “If I can find him, I can—”

“No,” Aizawa cuts in firmly. “No one’s going anywhere. You and the others are safe here, we can’t risk throwing more students into the fray. We need to protect everyone we can.”

“But—!”

“Iida, please.” Aizawa looks him in the eyes, and his expression carries an odd mixture of firmness and sympathy. “Don’t make this any harder than it already is.”

Tenya’s teeth snap together. He says nothing more.

The group, lead by Shouto and Tokoyami with Shouji bringing up the rear, continues down into the forest, maintaining their course on one of the many winding trails of the Pussycats’ forest.

“It should lead us back to the facility eventually,” Tokoyami says offhandedly as they continue down the path. “It may leave us more open to attacks, but since we don’t know where the villains are, if we take an off-road path, we could be wandering straight into an ambush.”

“An ambush,” Midoriya repeats, frowning. He has a dazed, far-off look in his eyes, and the dried blood on the side of his face looks worse than ever. “Ambush…”

Shouji’s face doesn’t change, but his tone becomes something darker and less friendly. “Don’t you *dare* make a pun out of that.”

Midoriya sighs longingly. “If my head was any clearer, I would,” he says, “but for now—”

There’s a sudden shout from up ahead, startling the entire group. It ends in an echo and doesn’t return, but it’s enough to put them all on edge. In a silent agreement, they stoop closer to the ground and advance quickly but quietly towards the racket. They hurry down the path, make a detour through the trees, and burst into a semi-clearing.

The first thing Shouto sees is Uraraka, pinning a villain to the ground. Her face is distorted in pain, and there's a gash on her arm as well as grime and dirt on her face. Tsuyu is on the ground nearby, holding her arm, but she's conscious and otherwise unharmed.

"Uraraka!" Tokoyami hollers at once.

Uraraka raises her head, eyes wide, and unfortunately, it gives the villain beneath her the opening she needs. The villain kicks Uraraka off of her and sprints into the shadows of the trees without a single word otherwise. She's gone before Shouto can stop her.

"Don't try to follow her," Tokoyami says, holding an arm out to Shouto. "We were given permission to fight in order to protect ourselves, nothing more."

Shouto doesn't like it, but he doesn't argue, either. "You're right," he says, lowering his arm. He doesn't even remember raising it in the first place. "The villains aren't our top priority."

"You guys!" Uraraka says, sprinting over. Tsuyu flanks her, limping only slightly. "Are you okay?"

"We're fine," Shouto answers. "How about you two?"

"Just a couple scratches," Uraraka says, shaking her head. "We're lucky you guys showed up when you did. T-That could've ended really badly..." Her voice trails off, and she shakes her head vigorously.

"You heard Mandalay's message, didn't you?" Tsuyu asks, tapping her finger against her chin. "About Bakugou?"

Shouto nods. "We did," he says. "They're after Midoriya, too, which is why we're escorting them."

There's a beat.

"...You're...escorting them?" Uraraka says, eyes wide.

The realization dawns slowly at first, then all at once. Shouto doesn't even need to look over his shoulder. Neither does Tokoyami. Uraraka's eyes fill with something, something like horror and fear.

"Todoroki, they're…" Her voice shakes. "They're *not there."*

"Brilliant, isn't it?"

All heads turn and all eyes raise towards the direction of the voice. Perched on one of the highest branches in a nearby tree is a villain, and between his fingers he holds three bright blue marbles.

“You had your backs turned, and I palmed them!” the villain sings grandly with a swing of his cane. “And none of you had any idea of what was happening! Truly, this is a magician’s greatest accomplishment…”

Shouto’s teeth snap together, and his hands ball into fists. The horror of the situation hasn’t caught up with him (yet), and his mind goes right to problem-solving mode.

“Let them go!” Uraraka shrieks before Shouto can do anything.

“Release them!” Tokoyami interjects, stepping forward and crouching. “They do not belong to you, unhand them!”

“My, my, my, what hypocrites,” the villain says, shaking his head. He settles his cane on his wrist, then shakes a finger back and forth scoldingly. “You say their lives don’t belong to us? Their lives don’t belong to *you,* either. I say, down with the oppression of the Hero Society!” At this, he spreads his arms wide like he’s welcoming an embrace. “We will allow these three to stand on stages where they can *really* shine!”

“Stop him!” Shouto shouts, twisting the ball of his foot into the ground. The ice juts forth, fast and powerful. “If he gets away—!”

“Aaaand that’s my cue to leave!” The villain closes his fist around the three marbles and swings his cane. The ice rages toward him. “As much as I’d love to stay for an encore, I must be going!”

The ice doesn’t reach him fast enough; he slams the butt of his cane onto the branch on which he stands and blasts himself in the opposite direction, soaring over the treetops with his three captives.

As one, Shouto, Tokoyami, Uraraka and Tsuyu take off through the forest. Shouto keeps his head raised, eyes locked on the villain, but he’s moving faster than they are. If the entire purpose of this was to nab Midoriya, Bakugou and Shouji on the way, then—

“We can’t catch up!” Uraraka says what everyone else has already realized, and her voice breaks. “We have to think of something, now!”

Midoriya would know what to do, but Midoriya isn’t here right now.

So—

Think like him.

“Tokoyami!” Shouto hollers; Tokoyami’s head turns, and he meets his eyes. “Dark Shadow, can he launch us after the villain!?”

Tokoyami’s eyes blow wide. “He could,” he says uncertainly, “but, under these circumstances—”

“You can do it!” Uraraka cuts in. Her voice cracks. “I know you can keep Dark Shadow under control, Tokoyami, I *know* you can! Please, this is our only chance! We have to save them!”

Tokoyami grits his teeth, and for a long moment, he says nothing.

Then, he raises his head. There’s a fire in his eyes that hadn’t been there before. “Alright,” Tokoyami says firmly, “let’s do it.”

Shouto skids to a halt, as do the others around them, and Tokoyami summons Dark Shadow from within him. Dark Shadow materializes before them, towering above even the treetops, and Shouto takes a long, deliberate step backwards to give him space.

“Dark Shadow!” Tokoyami commands, and his voice carries a weight that it didn’t before. “Launch them into the sky, that way!” He swings an arm to point; the villain is barely a speck of orange in the dark sky now. He’s getting away, and he’s taking Bakugou, Shouji and Midoriya with him.

Dark Shadow stares at Tokoyami for a long moment. Uraraka and Tsuyu take a step back, just in case, and for a while, Shouto doesn’t think it’ll work.

But then, Dark Shadow stretches one arm toward Shouto and the other toward Uraraka and Tsuyu. Black tendrils coil around them; they’re lifted, and before Shouto has the chance to think, they’re thrown into the sky on a bullet-straight course towards the villain.

Shouto snaps his teeth together to keep from shrieking. The wind is in his hair, sharp and stinging, and Uraraka and Tsuyu shoot through the air at his left.

“I’ll take out the villain!” Tsuyu yells, leveling herself. “Watch the landing, you two! Be careful!”

The villain is close now, a distinguishable figure rather than a far-off speck. He turns his head, and that's all he has the chance to do before Tsuyu slams into him.

The two disappear in the treetops, and Shouto focuses on his own landing. He has faith that Uraraka will have no problem landing safely; now he has to worry about himself.

The treetops are in his sight, and so is the band of villains. Shouto swings his right arm. A ramp of ice forms exactly where he needs it, and Shouto slides down and hops off, feet touching solid ground.

Uraraka lands across from him, twigs and leaves stuck in her hair. Between them, Tsuyu slams the marble villain into the ground and pins him there.

The other villains have noticed their arrival now. The first one—the same girl that Uraraka had had pinned before—leaps at Tsuyu and tackles her off the marble villain and to the ground.

Uraraka and Shouto move to help her, but a burst of blue flames blasts out of nowhere, straight towards them.

"Watch out!" Shouto hollers, springing backwards out of the way. Uraraka does the same on the opposite side of the flames. "Tsuyu—!"

"I've got it!" Tsuyu's voice shouts through the roaring flames, although Shouto still can't see her. "Get the marbles! Stop him!"

Shouto is snapped back to reality. Uraraka is moving already, running, and Shouto follows her. The villain is in their sights. He's close. He's trying to run but he's close. They can get to him. They can. They can, they *have to*—

And then the warp gates open.

Several of them, purple and black, swirling in mid-air and expanding until they're as tall and wide as Shouto. A bigger one opens a little ways in front of him and Uraraka, wider, taller, more intimidating. The villain from before, the one holding Midoriya, Shouji, and Bakugou in his marbles, steps towards the gate. So do the other surrounding villains.

"Ahhh, those looks on your faces," the marble villain says, turning to them and smiling while backing into the swirling abyss. He holds up his hand with the three marbles in between his fingers, showing them

off like trophies. Like spoils of war. “This is a most extravagant moment. It’s a shame the curtains are closing now—”

Tsuyu’s tongue swings out of nowhere and knocks into the villain’s hand.

The marbles go flying.

“Grab one!” Tsuyu yells from behind them, voice muffled around her tongue. “Grab one, hurry!”

Uraraka and Shouto leap forward, hands outstretched.

Tsuyu’s tongue closes around one marble and yanks it back.

Uraraka reaches for the second marble, but another hand juts from the abyss and closes around it instead.

Shouto’s fingertips graze the final marble, but he doesn’t reach. Another hand, stitched and damaged, reaches out and grabs takes it.

Shouto’s head snaps up. Dabi grins deviously, holding the marble up for Shouto to see.

“How sad, Todoroki Shouto.”

The marble villain snaps his fingers with a smile, and there’s a pop and a crack.

Shouji appears by Tsuyu, gasping but unharmed.

The knife girl, half way in the warp gate, holds Bakugou around his waist.

Dabi’s fingers are wrapped around Midoriya’s throat.

Midoriya meets Shouto’s eyes, and Shouto sees a lot of things. He sees fear, franticness, disbelief—everything Shouto himself is currently feeling.

And then, Midoriya’s eyes flicker over to Bakugou.

It happens quickly. Midoriya’s body goes limp. Dabi tightens his hold around him to keep him from slipping from his grasp. On the other side of the warp gate, the girl holding Bakugou lets out a shriek of pain and brings her arms up towards her face. Bakugou falls with an indistinguishable shout. Uraraka grabs his wrist and yanks him away.

The villains back into the gate. Shouto raises his left arm, hand ablaze, but he can't attack Dabi without hitting Midoriya's body.

The gate slams shut. The purple and black abyss swirls out of sight.

"Oh."

In front of them, Midoriya materializes as though from out of nowhere, but it isn't actually his body. It's his spirit, outlined with neon green and flickering fainty.

Shouto knows what this means. He wishes he didn't.

Midoriya stares down at his hands, flickering in and out. Then, he turns his head and meets Shouto's eyes.

"Todoroki," Midoriya says, and his voice shakes, and it feels so wrong to be called Todoroki from Midoriya now, after everything. It feels *so wrong*. "Todoroki, I'm—"

His entire form flickers, and Midoriya lets out a sharp cry, eyes screwing shut.

"Midoriya—!"

Shouto reaches for him, but can't do it in time. Midoriya flickers out and vanishes.

Silence. For a long, *long* moment, silence engulfs the entire area. Uraraka and Bakugou are on the ground. Shouto is standing, hand still outstretched towards where Midoriya had been only moments before. Tsuyu bounds up to them, but even her footsteps are muffled through Shouto's ears.

Bakugou is here, staring at the empty space where Midoriya had been before.

Midoriya is gone.

The weight of what this means sinks in like a knife to the chest, and Shouto sinks to the ground, bows his head against the earth, and screams.

Howler's head snaps off the ground, ears twitching. That's the first indication that something is wrong.

“What is it?” Kirishima asks, leaping from his chair and hurrying towards the dog. “What’s wrong? Howl—wait!”

Howler scrambles to his feet and tries making a break for it. Tenya barely has time to reach out and snag his collar in time. Hower thrashes, yowling and howling and shrieking and it’s the most *godawful sound* Tenya has ever heard.

“Calm down!” Tenya says, holding tighter to Howler’s collar when the dog thrashes harder. “Howler, everything’s fine, you have to—!”

The door swings open. Howler stops thrashing momentarily, and everyone present in the room looks up. Tokoyami stands in the doorway, eyes wide, covered in dirt and grime.

“They’re gone,” Tokoyami says, and his voice breaks.

Before Tenya has the chance to respond or even register the words, Howler wriggles out of his grip and bolts past Tokoyami outside.

“Wait!” Tenya hollers, taking off after him. “Howler!”

He races outside. A low-flying helicopter zooms past overhead, and the sound grates through Tenya’s ears worse than a chainsaw. He hears distant sirens, coming closer. Groups of students flock around unconscious or wounded classmates, speaking in hushed voices. Tenya can’t hear any of them beyond the roaring of the helicopters and fireplanes circling overhead.

Walking towards them, not too far off, are Todoroki, Uraraka, Tsuyu, Bakugou and Shouji. Their heads are down. Howler is rushing towards them, and Tenya takes off after the dog towards the group.

He reaches them shortly after Howler, and he takes Todoroki by the shoulders. “Todoroki,” he says urgently, looking him in the eyes. “What happened? What’s wrong? Where’s Midoriya?”

Todoroki is staring at him, but his eyes are wide and unseeing. He opens his mouth, gets out a couple syllables Tenya can’t decipher, then falls silent.

“Iida, I-I…”

Tenya turns. Uraraka meets his eyes, and there are tears streaming down her face. Beside her is Tsuyu, and although she isn’t outright *crying,* her eyes are bloodshot and wet. Bakugou doesn’t turn towards

him, rather staring off into space at nothing. His face carries no expression.

“Uraraka, Tsuyu...” Tenya says breathlessly, and his hands slip from Todoroki’s shoulders to sway limply at his sides. “What…”

“They took him,” Shouji says, and while his voice is steady, his balled fists tremble. “They took Midoriya.”

Tenya’s vision *spins.*

“Who took him?” he says even though he already knows the answer. He’s just hoping it’s a lie. *“Who took him?* Shouji, *what happened to Midoriya?”*

Shouji does not answer a second time. Tsuyu squeezes Uraraka’s shoulder, Shouto stares at the ground, Bakugou doesn’t move, and Howler raises his head towards the burning forest beyond and lets out the most desperate, tortured sound Tenya has ever heard.

Chapter End Notes

> *“I imagine death so much it feels more like a memory,*
> *This is where it gets me, on my feet, the enemy ahead of me...”*

Hurricane

Chapter Summary

"Hurricane" from Hamilton

"In the eye of a hurricane,
There is quiet,
For just a moment,
A yellow sky..."

Chapter Notes

ART!!

chiangyorange

itsbyme

A scenario by FloatingOnAFeeling

THANK YOU ALL SO VERY MUCH!! :D Enjoy the chapter!!

Warning: chapter contains violence, elements of torture (no gore/ blood, nothing beyond the T warning). Viewer digression is advised. If you want a clearer warning as to what you're getting into before actually reading, check the end notes for a brief summary.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He is gone.

*My boy is **gone.***

*I feel him but I don't feel him. I know he's somewhere but he's not **here.** I felt his hurt and I felt his pain, but I can't find him.*

*I call for him and he **does not answer.***

*I'm trying to find him but I **can't.***

*My boy is gone and I am here and I **don't want to be here** without my boy. I don't. I don't. I don't. **I don't.***

I don't know where my boy is.

*My boy's friends are here and they are scared and they are hurt and they are worried too but they're **here** so they're **okay.** I know where they are. I can watch over them.*

But I don't know where my boy is. I don't know where he is and I can't find him. I call to him and he doesn't answer. I'm trying to reach him but I can't feel him anymore.

He's gone.

My boy is gone.

*He's gone and I don't know if he'll come back. He's gone and I don't know where he is. I have to find him. I'm supposed to protect him. I said I would protect him and now I **can't.***

I need to find him.

*I'm **going to find him.***

*Somehow I'm going to. I will protect my boy just like he protects me and his friends. I'm going to find him and he's going to be **okay.** My boy has to be okay. He will be. **He will be.***

Until I find him, I will protect his friends for him, that way he doesn't have to worry about them.

And then, when I find my boy, I will protect him again too. I will make sure he's safe and happy. I will make sure he isn't hurt.

I will find him. I will protect him. He's my boy, and I don't want him to go forever.

Howler has been trying to get Shouto's attention for the past thirty minutes. Or maybe it's been longer than thirty minutes. Maybe it's been shorter. It feels like it's been a forever.

They're awaiting transportation now. The fireplanes are putting out the remaining fires, and the smoke is finally beginning to clear, so it won't be long now, but even so. Every second ticks by like an hour, and bit by bit, Shouto feels like he's losing his mind.

There were no fatalities. Nobody *died.* There are lots of injuries, yes, but most of them are minor and can be dealt with within only a few days in the hospital. Even the forest, burned and damaged, will eventually heal.

But the villains have Midoriya. The *villains have Midoriya.*

Shouto has Howler. Howler has been nuzzling him and trying to get some sort of reaction out of him for a *long time* now, and Shouto hasn't been able to bring himself to so much *think* about the animal. Midoriya's last cry of pain rings through Shouto's ears like a broken record, and he *can't.* He *can't.*

He can't.

Toshinori is stepping into his apartment when his phone rings. It's around 9pm, he believes (that's what time it'd been last he checked the clock, before getting on the train to return home), and he pulls his phone from his back pocket, flicking on the lightswitch with his other hand.

Naomasa Tsukauchi, reads the caller ID. Without hesitation, Toshinori answers it. "Hello?"

"Toshinori." Naomasa's voice comes back immediately, and it's stern and very straight to the point. *"Listen, I know it's late, but I...have some news. From Aizawa. The students' training camp up in the forest with the Pussycats...the kids were attacked."*

Toshinori *almost* loses his grip on his phone. "They were—"

"I know, I know, it shouldn't be possible, but it happened," Naomasa cuts in, and there's a bite to his tone that hadn't been there before. *"I don't know how it happened, and we've got every detective on the force looking into it, but we haven't been able to uncover anything so far."*

"What about the students?" Toshinori asks urgently, ready to put his coat back on and bolt down to the police station right now if need be. "Are they alright? Are they safe?"

He hates the long pause of silence that comes before Naomasa's answer.

"...Several of them sustained injuries, ranging anywhere between mild and severe. A couple of them were gassed, and the doctors are still testing the air, so we don't know how serious their conditions are."

Toshinori's head is spinning. He can't think.

"And...Toshinori, I...I'm gonna have to ask that you sit down for a second.

And I want you to take in a deep breath as soon as I say it. Alright?"

"What?" Toshinori says, voice thick. "What is it? Tsukauchi?"

"Midoriya. They…the villains have Midoriya. At the time, we don't know the villains' whereabouts, but—"

The phone slips out of his hand and hits the carpeted floor below.

Endeavor doesn't spare Shouto a passing glance when he is driven home by the police. Endeavor has, apparently, been summoned in by the police, no doubt to talk regarding their current situation with Midoriya in the hands of the villains.

Fuyumi is there, and she tries talking to him, asks why in the world there's a dog with him, but Shouto doesn't answer. He can't. Howler has been following him, and the police had let him ride with Shouto home, but Shouto almost, *almost* doesn't want him here. He reminds him too much of Midoriya.

Shouto goes to bed that night with a chest full of lead. What couple hours of sleep he does manage to catch are tortured by Midoriya's final shriek of pain and flickering image.

When he wakes up in the middle of the night, covered in sweat with Midoriya's pained face in his mind's eye, throat parched and eyes burning, he finds himself making his way from his room into the kitchen of the house for a glass of water.

"Shouto?"

Shouto *almost* jumps right out of his skin, but refrains. Fuyumi looks back at him, only half illuminated in the small light on over the sink.

"What are you doing up?" Fuyumi asks gently, and she knows there was an attack, but she doesn't know the extent of what'd happened. And Shouto hasn't told her. "Is everything okay?"

And Shouto wants to tell her the truth, he wants to tell her, but he can't, he can't tell her how he really feels, not when the one thing running through his head is

It's all my fault.

"I'm fine," Shouto lies. "I had a bad dream, so I'm getting some water. I'm sorry if I woke you."

Fuyumi opens her mouth as though to say something else, but she refrains. "...If you say so," she says, though she doesn't seem convinced. "Shouto, you...you know you can tell me anything, don't you?"

He does. But right now, he can't. He doesn't have the mental strength to.

"I do," he says. "Thank you, Nee-san."

Fuyumi offers him a smile he doesn't return, and Shouto takes his glass of water and heads back to his room. He guzzles it down in one go, sets the glass on the side table, and faceplants into his bed, feeling an odd mixture of exhausted and wide awake.

It's all my fault.

Shouto grits his teeth and grabs a fistful of his pillowcase in both hands, burying his face in the pillow to hide his face.

It's all my fault.

Midoriya's shriek of pain echoes through his mind again for what feels like the utmost time that night. Shouto doesn't think he'll ever be rid of it.

It's all my fault this happened.

He feels the ghost of the marble on his fingertips. He'd touched it, but couldn't reach it. He'd been close, reaching, yet never *grasping.*

This is all my fault.

When Howler hops onto Shouto's bed and lays on top of him, Shouto doesn't even push him off.

It's the first time in a long while that Ochako has been truly afraid to be left alone.

She's been living by herself for quite some time now; she found herself a cheap apartment that she could afford so long as she got a couple hours in at her workplace downtown (anything she can do to help her parents pay the rent), and she's gotten quite used to coming home alone since then. She's had to.

But now, she'd do just about anything to sink into her parents' arms

and stay there until the world ends.

She moves into her bedroom—a small room about the size of a storage compartment but with a nice sliding door leading to the balcony—and sits on her futon on the floor. She drags her knees against her chest and wraps her arms around her legs, eyes burning with tears she's been holding back for a long, long time.

She doesn't want to be alone, but maybe the solitude is nice. At least no one will have to see her cry—

Her phone rings. She raises her head, blinking away tears, and reaches for it.

[Incoming Call: Dad]

Ochako takes in a long, deep breath, then flips open the phone and answers it.

"H-Hello?"

"Ochako!" It's not just Dad, but Mom, too. They sound worried.

"We got a call from U.A.," Mom says, voice tight. *"Are you okay? They said there was an attack—"*

"I'm fine, don't worry," Ochako says, but as she says it, her eyes begin to burn again. She swallows back the lump in her throat, and it comes back a second later. "I got cut on my arm, but other than that I'm completely fine. You don't have to worry about me."

"Oh, thank God," Dad breathes, and he sounds relieved while Ochako's panic spikes. *"I'm glad you're safe. What about your friends? Are they okay? You're all safe?"*

It rushes at her in a wave, the reality if the situation, and Ochako chokes on a sob and brings her free hand to cover her mouth. The tears finally break loose and spill over her fingers.

"No," she strains, voice breaking and cracking over the single syllable word. "S-Some of them are in the hospital, a-and D-Deku—"

She has to stop. She's physically incapable of saying anything beyond that right now.

"Izuku-kun?" Mom says. Ochako has told them enough about "Deku" for them to know exactly who she's talking about. *"Ochako, you need*

to calm down, okay? Calm down, it's okay."

"It's *not,"* Ochako sobs, shaking her head feverishly. Her tears fall and leave wet splotches on the futon beneath her. "It's *not okay,* the villains, th-they—they took him, *they have him,* they—"

She loses her breath, takes in a shuddering inhale, and shakes her head again. Her parents say nothing, and she goes on.

"I was r-right there, I could've stopped it," she cries, and breathing is really hard now but she doesn't even care. "I could've *saved him,* but I didn't. All I did was *watch,* it's all I *could do.* I was so *powerless,* I couldn't even *reach out to him,* I couldn't, I-I...I *can't—"*

"Ochako, no, it isn't your fault," Dad says gently. *"You can't blame yourself for what happened. This whole situation, it's…"* He stops, refrains; *"There's nothing you could have done about it, kiddo. This situation...it's not your fault."*

His steady voice, in contrast to her own, is like water in the desert. She clings to his words like a lifeline, and her knuckles are white from gripping her phone so tightly. She doesn't necessarily believe him, but she takes his words to heart regardless.

"We're hopping on the first plane over there tomorrow," Mom says, and her voice is soft, although strained. Maybe she's trying not to cry, too. The thought hurts. *"We'll be there soon, okay? Just hang in there, Ochako. It's going to be okay. Izuku-kun is going to be fine."*

"But what if he's *not?"* Ochako chokes out, chest clenching. She can't breathe again. "What if he's *not okay?* W-What if the villains—w-what if they k-k—" She can't bring herself to say it, she can't. "What if D-Deku *isn't okay?"*

"Blaming yourself is only going to make things harder for you, Ochako, believe me," Dad says firmly, in a voice that doesn't leave room for argument. *"This blaming yourself, it's going to overwhelm you sooner or later, and you can't let that happen. The heroes are going to rescue your friend, I know it, and when he comes back, he's gonna need you to be there for him. I know he'd be much happier knowing you aren't blaming yourself."*

Ochako takes in a sharp breath, holds it, then lets it out in a sob. "I know," she chokes. "I know, I *know,* I know, I do, I just, I can't—"

"It's going to be okay. You have to believe that, Ochako."

She wants to. She really, *really* wants to, but, “Dad, I *c-can’t—”*

“We can’t lose hope, no matter what,” Dad cuts in before she has the chance to finish her thought. *“I know it’s gonna seem impossible, but we need to stay strong, here. Your mother and I will be there soon, and when the heroes rescue your friend, you need to be strong for him. He’s gonna need you.”*

Those four final words strike Ochako, but not for the reason her father might think. She blinks once, then twice. Her tears dry. Her head clears. She stares off into space.

“Ochako? You still there, honey?”

“Y-Yeah, I’m here,” Ochako says, wiping the remnants of tears off her cheeks. “…Thank you, b-both of you. I…I’ll do my best to not blame myself. F-For Deku.”

“Good girl,” Dad says, and she can hear the smile in his voice, even if his tone is still laced with pain and worry. *“We’ll see you soon, okay?”*

“Okay,” Ochako says, nodding. “I-I’ll be here.”

“Hang in there, alright?”

“I will, I promise. Bye.”

“Bye, honey.”

She hangs up, lowers the phone to the ground, and sits there on the futon for a long moment.

He’s gonna need you, Dad had said. *He’s gonna need you.*

That’s true. When Deku is rescued, when he’s brought back…Ochako doesn’t know *what* that’s going to be like. She doesn’t know what the villains want with him or what they’re going to do with him. Deku is going to need all the help and support he can get.

But that’s not all. That isn’t the only thing Ochako garnered from her father’s words.

Deku is going to need her and the others *then,* sure, but…

He really needs them to be there for him *now, while* he’s in the villains’ custody. That’s when he’ll be hurting the most. That’s when he’ll *need them* the most. That’s when their actions will *really* make a

difference.

The thought sparks something in her heart, a new determination that hadn't been there before. Her path is clear. The fog is gone. She knows exactly what she has to do from this moment forward.

Deku…

…Hang in there just a little longer.

The news finds out about it the next day, and Shouto's feed on his phone—social medias, his news app, even conspiracy theory sites—has completely blown up. He can't even open his safari without the front page displaying the words "MIDORIYA IZUKU: ABDUCTED FROM UNDER U.A.'S NOSE!" He tries not to let it get to him, but it does. Of course it does.

Kirishima is standing outside of the hospital when Shouto steps toward it. Kirishima turns and looks at him over his shoulder, and there's something in Kirishima's eyes that Shouto has never actually seen before, despite everything they've been through thus far. Something deep. Something dark.

"Hey," Kirishima says thickly, and he turns towards the hospital again with that same look on his face. "Kinda pathetic, I…" He reaches up and scratches the back of his neck, smiling. It looks more like a wince. "I've been here for twenty minutes, and I haven't been able to move another step. Pretty pathetic, right?"

Shouto looks at him for a long moment. "…I don't think it's pathetic," he says, and he hates that his voice cracks.

"I just…" Kirishima runs both hands through his hair and bites his lip again for a time. "I can't believe he's actually…I can't *believe…"*

Shouto swallows hard. Howler's wet nose presses against his hand. "I know," he says, "I know. Everything feels so…"

Unreal. Hellish.

This is a worst-case scenario, the kind of thing the teachers were concerned with, the kind of thing that Shouto always thought about, because honestly, what *would* happen if one of them was nabbed by the villains? It'd been hypothetical before, of course, and god-forbid and all that, but now, that what-if has become reality.

“I’ll go with you,” Shouto says heavily, and he isn’t even sure why he says it. “If you can’t muster the courage to go alone, I’ll go with you.”

Kirishima nods thickly, says a quick thank-you, and the two of them head up the last steps and into the hospital.

It’s surprisingly quiet. The waiting room is full of people, parents, friends; Shouto doesn’t recognize any of them, but some of them share resemblance with a few of his classmates, so he can guess.

Iida is there, actually, sitting on one of the chairs with his head down and his fingers threaded together tightly. Shouto and Kirishima exchange glances, then turn towards Iida again and approach.

“Hey, Iida.”

Iida raises his head, first at Kirishima who spoke, then at Shouto. “You two…”

Kirishima smiles. It looks painful. “Can we join you?”

Iida nods simply after a pause, and Shouto and Kirishima take their seats on either side of him. Nurses bustle about, doctors call names, people rise from their seats and follow said doctors down the hallways…

“Have you heard anything about the others?” Kirishima asks, turning towards Iida. “Yaoyorozu, Jirou, Hagakure…”

Iida takes in a breath. “Yaoyorozu is still unconscious,” he says, “but, when I asked about her, the doctors seemed hopeful. As for Jirou and Hagakure...the doctors identified the gas, and it isn’t particularly *harmful,* but they don’t know when they’ll wake up.”

Shouto swallows hard. He hates that he can’t find any words worth saying.

For a time, nothing more happens. Shouto, Kirishima and Iida simply sit there and watch the people around them move, come, and go; a part of Shouto wants to speak to the receptionist, but he doesn’t know what good that would do. He doubts he’ll be allowed to see anyone, and even if by some chance the hospital staff *did* let him, he wouldn’t have anything meaningful to say to the classmates he’d visit.

The doors of the hospital open again, but this time Howler, laying at Shouto’s feet, perks up and turns his head. So far, even as people had

come and gone, Howler hadn't reacted to the door whatsoever.

This time he does, though, and Shouto raises his head out of mere curiosity.

At once, his entire body tenses.

No, not now. Please, not now…I can't, I can't, not right now…

Endeavor stands in the doorway. The waiting room isn't nearly as busy as it'd been when Shouto and Kirishima first arrived, but there are still people around, and they turn and watch in confusion as the number two hero surveys the room.

For a moment, nothing happens.

And then Endeavor's eyes fall on Shouto.

Howler sits up, and Shouto, absentmindedly, threads his numb fingers through Howler's fur, right by his collar. His name tags clink together, and it reminds Shouto, startlingly, of Midoriya's bell.

"There you are," Endeavor says, approaching. Something in the air changes, something Shouto is so familiar with feeling that it's almost like a long lost friend. Or a persistent demon. "I've been looking for you—"

Howler *snarls.*

Iida and Kirishima jump, whirling around to stare at the dog. Shouto supposes he should be more surprised than he is, considering he's never, *ever* heard Howler make such an aggressive, threatening sound, but in the wake of everything else that's happened, he doesn't even flinch.

Endeavor does, though. He actually takes a full step backwards. Despite this, he raises his head again and tries to meet Shouto's eyes. Shouto doesn't look at him.

"Shouto," Endeavor says, and he side-eyes Iida and Kirishima before settling his gaze on Shouto again. "You shouldn't be here right now. You should go home."

It isn't a suggestion. Shouto knows it isn't a suggestion.

"I want to see my friends," he says eventually, and it takes courage to get the words out, to say them to his father. He raises his head to meet

Endeavor's eyes, and this time, he doesn't look away. "I need to make sure they're okay. I'll go home afterwards."

The slightest thing in Endeavor's eyes changes. They slant, narrow, just *barely* enough for Shouto to notice. Kirishima and Iida probably don't notice a change, but Shouto does.

And so, apparently, does Howler.

Endeavor reaches out, to do *what,* Shouto never knows. Howler's snarling gets louder and more aggressive, and eventually, he lurches forward. He doesn't do it to bite, doesn't do it to attack, but it's a warning. A deliberate *back off.*

And Endeavor does. He withdraws his hand like he's been burned, and when he raises his head again, Shouto meets his eyes without fear.

"...Come home as soon as you're done here," Endeavor says (commands), and he turns and leaves the hospital shortly thereafter, storming through the double doors and out into the sunlight.

Shouto releases a huge breath he didn't know he was holding, and beside him, Kirishima and Iida do the same. Howler stops growling as soon as Endeavor is gone, and he lays down calmly at Shouto's feet again as though nothing had happened at all.

"What was that?" Kirishima asks, blinking at Shouto. "Your dad worried about you or something?"

"Dunno," Shouto lies. Endeavor isn't worried about him; he just likes knowing where Shouto is. All the time. "Can we please... *not* talk about what just happened? It doesn't matter. Howler's on edge like the rest of us, and my father is a pretty intimidating person. I'm sure he overreacted."

Except, he knows it's more than that. He knows Howler had been protecting him. He doesn't know *how* Howler knew Endeavor is dangerous, but somehow, he did. Shouto has never been more thankful for Howler than he is in this moment.

"...I'm sorry," Iida says out of the blue. Both Shouto and Kirishima turn to him, and Iida doesn't look at either of them. "I'm supposed to be leading the class," Iida says slowly. "I'm supposed to be making sure everyone stays safe, but in the end, when it came down to it—"

"Don't say that," Kirishima cuts in sharply, shaking his head. "Don't

say that, man, c'mon. We're all stressing out over what happened," (His voice shakes), "we're all worried, we're all upset, but we can't blame ourselv—" His voice breaks off, and he turns away sharply, pressing the heels of his hands into his eyes. He breathes raggedly between his teeth for a few moments. "Dammit, *dammit, why*— I'm feeling it, too, man, we're *all feeling it—"*

They don't look at each other.

"I was *right there with you,* Iida," Kirishima breathes, resting his elbows on his knees and bowing his head into his hands. "I couldn't do *jack,* man, I was stuck in the same boat as you, we're *all—"*

He takes in a breath, and says nothing more. Shouto stares off into space, and he can almost feel it, the cool, smooth surface as his fingers had grazed Midoriya's marble, moments before Dabi snatched it out from in front of him. He'd touched it. He'd *felt it.*

He'd been *that close,* but just far enough.

"You guys…"

Shouto, Kirishima, and Iida finally look up, the three of them in unison. Uraraka is standing before them, forearm bandaged, eyes bearing all of the guilt and sorrow that Shouto feels.

"Uraraka," Iida greets. Kirishima raises a hand to show he acknowledges her, but says nothing. "Are you…? How are your injuries?"

Uraraka shakes her head. "I'm fine," she says, fingers brushing over her bandaged forearm. "How are you guys? N-Not just, physically, but...all around?"

Honestly? Shouto would rather be gutted than feel the way he does now.

"We're...okay," Kirishima says at long last. "But, I mean...there's only a small amount of 'okay' that anyone can have in this situation."

Uraraka swallows hard, then sinks onto the chair beside Kirishima, and for a long while, there's silence. Bit by bit, the waiting room begins to empty. Parents go back into rooms and do not return, others come and go, and soon, only Shouto, Iida, Kirishima, Uraraka, and Howler remain.

"...I don't think we should blame ourselves," Uraraka says quietly, and everyone turns to look at her. "I've been thinking a lot lately...about how I could have grabbed Bakugou back then, and...and that if I *had,* it would've given Deku the window he needed to save himself."

Kirishima raises a hand, hesitates, then lowers it again. "I get it, Uraraka, we're all—"

"Let me finish," Uraraka interrupts sharply. "Please, let me finish. This is important."

Kirishima falls silent, and Uraraka takes in a deep breath, lets it out shakily, and goes on.

"I could've saved Bakugou, and Deku would have been able to save himself," Uraraka says, voice trembling, "but it didn't happen that way, and regretting what we could've done won't change what's happened now. Playing the blame game, even if it's just with ourselves, it's...it's dangerous."

"I know," Kirishima says, speaking for Iida and Shouto as well, "I know that, but, gah, what else are we supposed to *do?"*

"We could use this guilt as a reason to move forward."

Uraraka has their attention now, complete and undivided.

"...Listen." At this, Uraraka looks around for a moment; the receptionist is taking notes on a legal pad, and two nurses speak in hushed voices on the other side of the waiting room. "...You're going to hate this. You're going to think I'm *crazy.* But I want to save Deku."

The most scary part of this isn't her words, but rather, the lack of reaction to her words. There's no jump, there's no startle, there's no loud, booming "WHAT!?" Just silence.

Silence, and a small, unspoken agreement between the four of them.

"I don't like the thought of barreling in there guns-blazing," Iida says when the silence stretches. "Aside from being against the law, the idea is completely ludicrous."

"We don't have to go in guns-blazing," Shouto says, and as he speaks, the realization sinks in for him, too. "We don't even have to go in the front doors. All we have to do is get in there and get Midoriya out."

“I think I know what you mean,” Kirishima says, nodding. A nurse passes close by, and the group falls silent until she’s well out of earshot. “Like, a secret rescue mission. We’ll go in there, grab Midoriya, and get out.”

“That’s what I was thinking,” Uraraka says, nodding “except, the problem with that is…the police can’t even figure out where the villain’s base is located. So, honestly…I have no idea how we’d even *find* Deku, let alone sneak in without the villains knowing and save him.”

“Time out,” Iida says, slightly louder than the rest of them. It doesn’t draw the nurses’ attentions, but it does cause Shouto’s, Uraraka’s, and Kirishima’s heads to turn. “We’re all feeling the weight of this situation,” Iida says, and his voice is thick, though it doesn’t waver. “Right now…we need to give ourselves some time to take in all that’s happened. After that, we can start thinking of a plan.”

Kirishima opens his mouth.

“I know waiting is the last thing anyone wants to do right now,” Iida cuts in, “but either way, until the police have a lead, there’s no chance of us finding Midoriya in the first place. Let’s just…take a step back for a moment. Afterwards, we’ll come up with a plan and go from there.”

Shouto doesn’t *like* it, but he knows they don’t have another option. “You’re right,” he says, nodding, “you’re right. We’ll come up with a plan.”

“But we’re all in agreement,” Uraraka says, and unlike before, her voice carries a higher level of certainty and determination. “We’re going to save Deku, right? We’ll find a way?”

Shouto is in agreement. Kirishima is in agreement. So they look to Iida.

Iida takes in a long breath, lets it out, then nods.

“We’re all in agreement,” he says. “As soon as we have a plan, we’ll do it.”

The front steps leading up to the Iida residence had been turned into a small ramp following the Hero Killer Stain incident. Tenya heads up said ramp now, alone, every step heavier than the last. He uses his own house key to unlock the door and head inside.

“Ay, Tenya!” Tensei calls from further within. “Welcome back!”

Tenya pulls off his shoes with one hand, the other hand shutting the door behind him. He steps off the welcome mat and into the house, taking slow, deliberate steps.

Tensei rounds the corner on his wheelchair, smiling. “Hey,” he says, raising a hand in greeting. “Good to see you again, Tenya. Did you see any of your friends at the hospital? Are they doing alright?”

Tenya nods stiffly. “I did,” he says, and the words feel rehearsed. Too rehearsed. “They’re doing alright. A couple of them are still unconscious, but their conditions aren’t life threatening.”

“Ah, that’s a relief,” Tensei says. His smile turns softer, more sad, and he looks away for a long moment. “Tenya, I…I saw the news earlier today.”

Of course he did. Everyone’s seen the news by now. Tenya had seen it on several screens just on his walk home from the hospital, all showing the same thing.

Tensei turns around in his wheelchair and starts down the hall, toward the kitchen. “Want a cup of tea? I’m making some anyway, so.”

“Sure,” Tenya says, following him. “Do you need help, or—”

“Nah, I’ve got it,” Tensei says breezily. “Just go sit on the couch, I’ll be there in a sec.”

Tenya nods and turns away, but stops short. “Tensei?”

“Yeah?”

“How are you going to carry both cups into the living room?”

There’s a beat. “…Actually, yeah, when the tea is ready I’ll give you a holler.”

“Alright.”

Shortly thereafter finds Tenya sitting on the couch, Tensei sitting beside him. The wheelchair is nearby, and while Tensei holds his own cup of tea, Tenya’s sits on the coffee table, untouched.

"...So," Tensei says, stirring his tea with a spoon, "the villains got their hands on Midoriya."

Tenya swallows, then nods. "Yes."

Tensei hums and nods, still stirring his tea needlessly. "And you're going to go save him."

Tenya rounds on him, eyes wide. "I didn't say that."

"You did now," Tensei says, smiling faintly (very, *very* faintly). Tenya sighs and looks away, and Tensei settles his cup on the coffee table and turns toward him.

"Tenya, listen," he says, "even if you *didn't* just make it obvious, I would've known. I know how you get sometimes with that single-track mind of yours, and I know how much Midoriya means to you."

"He's one of my best friends," Tenya says, and the impact of his words hits home for him, too. "He's done so much for me since I met him. He even forgave me after I put him through so much pain. He's made me a better person, he's taught me and protected me so much, I can't simply—" He pauses, takes a breath. "I cannot simply sit back, not after everything. I *can't."*

"I get it," Tensei says, shaking his head, "believe me, I get it, but Tenya...you can't let it happen again. Before, with Stain…" At this, Tensei glances at his wheelchair briefly, then shakes his head again. "You can't repeat the past. You can't go after the villains, even if your anger is justified."

"I promise you, this is nothing like that time," Tenya says firmly. "I will not be attacking the villains. Me and—" He stops himself before he can mention them by name, "—A couple of my friends and I, we're planning a scheme to infiltrate the villains' base of operations without their knowledge and rescue Midoriya before they realize what's happening."

"A rescue mission," Tensei repeats thoughtfully, and Tenya nods. "A rescue mission... *without* combat."

Tenya stiffens, then nods again.

"...Tenya, you know the likeliness of that—"

"It's little to none, I get it," Tenya cuts in sharply, "but I don't know

what else to do. It's not like Stain this time, Tensei. I don't want to make the villains pay for what they did, I just want—" He pauses, takes a breath.

"—I just want Midoriya back here safe where he belongs."

Tensei nods slowly. Thoughtfully.

"You can expose the scheme if you want to," Tenya says, "but if you must, please tell them it was my idea and that no one else had anything to do with it—"

"I'm not ratting you out, Tenya."

Tenya stops. "You're... *what?"*

"I said I'm not ratting you out," Tensei repeats, turning toward him. "That look in your eyes is completely different than before, when you wanted to go after Stain. You're a single-track minded person, Tenya, but you're not stupid. If you really think you can hatch a plan, get in there, grab Midoriya, and then get *out,* then...I won't stop you. Hell." Tensei exhales through his nose, then shakes his head. "I don't think I *could* stop you, even if I *wanted* to."

"I…" Tenya doesn't have words, and when he tries looking for them, he comes up empty handed. "Tensei, I...thank you. Thank you."

"Don't thank me yet," Tensei says, shaking his head. "You still have to figure out how you're going to actually *find* Midoriya, then save him. That's not going to be easy."

Tenya knows this. He's been thinking about it ever since Uraraka's declaration in the hospital. "I know. We'll find a way."

"I don't doubt it," Tenya says, and he takes his cup off the coffee table and stirs it (again). "When you find Midoriya, though, give him a pun from me, alright?"

When.

Tensei had said "when."

A simple choice of words, but it means all the difference in the word. Tenya nods.

"I will. Thank you, Nii-san."

“You’re welcome.” Tensei knocks his fist against Tenya’s shoulder lightly, meets his eyes, and smiles. “Good luck.”

Toshinori feels out of place. Despite the Midoriyas’ small but cozy apartment and Inko’s welcoming personality, in this situation, in this place, Toshinori feels incredibly *wrong.* He really should not be here.

“I’m glad you came,” Inko says, completely derailing Toshinori’s train of thought by sheer coincidence. She settles herself onto the couch across from the chair Toshinori is seated on, rests her hands in her lap, and looks down at them. “I appreciate you coming over and speaking to me about...everything.”

She’d already heard the news from Naomasa. Toshinori hadn’t needed to tell her about Midoriya, but leaving the woman alone, without even dropping by to check in on her, felt wrong. Almost as wrong as sitting in the living room with her when he’s half the reason why her son is missing now.

“The detectives and members of the police force are launching their investigation right now as we speak,” Toshinori says, because there’s no use beating around the bush with pointless small talk, not in this situation. “We’re going to do whatever it takes to get Izuku back, I promise you.”

Inko nods shakily. “I know,” she says, “I know you will, I just, I can’t…” She stops with a shaky, shuddering gasp, then shakes her head feverishly. “I’m not sure it’s exactly sunk in yet, everything. I know you’re going to do whatever you can, I know, but…he’s my *son,* and…”

She stops, shakes her head again. “I’m sorry,” she says, “I’m just rambling now, I’m—”

“No, no, it’s quite alright,” Toshinori assures her, shaking his head. “I’m sorry for barging in when you’re going through this.”

“It’s like I said, I’m glad you’re here,” Inko says, wiping her eyes with the back of a hand, “it’s just—”

The front door opens. Toshinori and Inko both turn in that direction, confused.

In walks Todoroki, and right by his side is Howler, ears flat against his head. Todoroki is holding a key attached to a metal chain in one hand.

"…Oh," Todoroki says, blinking. He looks more exhausted and drained than Toshinori has ever seen him, and there's something far-off about the look in his eyes that strikes Toshinori in the heart. "I'm sorry, I'm intruding—"

"Nonono, you're fine, Shouto!" Inko insists, leaping to her feet and hurrying towards him. Howler nuzzles her hand, then returns to Todoroki's side as though he had called him back. "You're absolutely fine, sweetheart, don't even worry about it. Do you want to come in for a moment? I could make some tea, or hot cocoa, whatever you like —"

"No, that's fine," Todoroki says; he glances over her shoulder and meets Toshinori's eyes, but only for a fraction of a second. "I just, came to drop Howler off. He's been with me since yesterday, so I thought I would bring him back home finally."

"Oh." Howler nuzzles Inko's hand again, but returns to Todoroki's side just as quickly. "Shouto—"

"And I want to apologize." Todoroki looks Inko in the eyes for a long moment, then turns his head toward Toshinori. "To both of you. When it came down to it, I…I couldn't save Midoriya. I failed him, even after everything he did for me, and—"

"Shouto, don't."

Inko reaches out, hesitates, then settles her hands on Todoroki's shoulders. Todoroki tenses for a moment, but relaxes again quickly.

"Don't apologize," Inko says, shaking her head. "I know you did everything you could to save him. It isn't your fault, so please, don't blame yourself for what happened. As for Howler…"

She looks down at the border collie, stationed at Todoroki's side, then smiles up at Todoroki again.

"He seems perfectly content to be with you right now," Inko says gently. "If you would like, you could keep him with you and bring him back later on tonight. You could even take the spare bedroom if you wanted to, if you didn't feel like going home."

Todoroki blinks wide but tired eyes at her. "Really?"

Inko nods. "Definitely," she says, giving his shoulders a small shake. "Just give me a call before you head over, alright? I'll make something

special for dinner."

"You don't have to—" Todoroki starts, then stops, takes in a breath, and lets it out. "...Thank you. I appreciate that."

Inko nods. Todoroki bows first to her, then to Toshinori, and he spins on his heel and leaves with Howler shortly thereafter. Toshinori watches him go, then takes in a long breath and folds his hands.

This situation is one of those "worst case scenarios" that Toshinori has always dreaded. It's one of those things he never thought *could* actually happen, because it's seemed too horrible to think, let alone become reality.

But here they are. Here *they* are, and here Izuku *is not.*

Izuku, my boy…

I promise, I'm going to do whatever it takes to save you.

Whatever it takes.

Uraraka is waiting for Shouto on the sidewalk below the apartment complex. She turns to Shouto as he approaches, smiling softly when she sees Howler still glued to his side.

"He didn't leave?" she asks, falling in step beside Shouto when he starts down the sidewalk.

Shouto nods stiffly. "Inko-san said that I could keep him with me for a while longer," he says simply. "She's...she's very kind."

Uraraka nods, too. "She is," she says. "She's a lot like Deku, actually."

Midoriya. Something in Shouto's stomach twists and constricts.

"...Hey, Todoroki, do...do you think we're doing the right thing?" Uraraka says quietly, voice wavering. "Back at the hospital, when I said we should go after Deku, I wasn't—I was just thinking with my heart, not my head. Do you think rescuing Deku like this, I mean...do you think it's the right thing to do?"

It should be a tricky question. Shouto should give it more thought, but he doesn't. All he thinks about is Midoriya, his light, his life, everything he's done, not just for Shouto but for the entirety of Class 1-A. After that, when the memories finish flashing through his mind,

the answer is simple.

“I do,” Shouto answers with little hesitation. “I know Midoriya would do the same for us in a heartbeat. Even if the heroes are already planning their own attack, if we get there first and rescue Midoriya, they’ll have a better chance at taking out the rest of the villains if they don’t have to be constantly thinking about him.”

Uraraka nods and looks down at the sidewalk. “...Except,” she says slowly, wringing her hands together, “there’s still the problem of actually *finding* the villains’ hideout.”

That’s the real problem here. If they put their heads together, Shouto has no doubt they’ll be able to come up with a smart, plausible, *safe* plan to rescue Midoriya, but the real issue comes in the fact that they have absolutely *no idea* where Midoriya actually *is*.

“We’ll figure it out,” Shouto says, even though he’s just as clueless as the next person. “No matter what happens, we’ll figure it out somehow. We have to.”

As if on cue, both Shouto’s and Uraraka’s phones ding in unison. They exchange a glance, then remove their respective phones from their pockets and read over the message.

It’s a message to their group chat from Kirishima. Uraraka reads the message from her phone. Shouto reads it from his. When they’re through, they turn towards each other in unison, eyes wide.

And then, they break into a sprint down the sidewalk with Howler hot on their heels.

[CHATROOM - “INSERT CLEVER TITLE HERE”]

[The Rock]
Meet me at the downtown plaza ASAP. When I was at the hospital a little while ago, I overheard one of the 1-B dudes talking to someone on the police force. As soon Yaoyorozu wakes up, I think I know how we’re gonna save Midoriya.

Izuku comes to screaming.

Something *snaps,* and he gasps in a breath and promptly chokes on it. His chest is burning, his head is full of mud, everything feels too

heightened and real and his vision is *white,* he can't see a thing, he doesn't know where he is, his spirit feels *stuck to* his body which is *wrong* something is *wrong* it shouldn't feel like this—

Everything returns to him suddenly and all at once. His vision, his hearing, his feeling. The burn in his chest is still very real but it isn't overwhelming him anymore, and he gasps and tries to get his breath back.

"Kid, kid, you're okay, calm down, you're okay."

"It's alright, it's over now, they stopped."

"Just calm down. Take in a deep breath."

Izuku does. He sucks in a shaky breath through his teeth, lets it out equally shakily, and tries not to cry.

"Wasn't expecting *that,* geez."

Someone grabs him by the wrists and twists his arms behind his back. He thrashes, but he's still reeling and can't put up a decent struggle. When he actually *looks,* he sees Dabi behind him, and he feels something cool and metallic on his wrists.

Shackles, probably, the more problem-solving part of him supplies, and he grits his teeth. *I didn't even realize they were putting them on me…*

"If he starts screaming like that every time we give him a controlled shock," Shigaraki says, sitting on a barstool on the other side of the room, "we're going to have to come up with some other way to keep him in his body. I can't stand that screeching."

Oh…a controlled shock…that's what it was…

…Well…that, and my distance limit…

"So," Izuku coughs out, and it sounded more intimidating in his head, really, it did. "You're just gonna keep shocking me whenever you think I'm gonna leave my body, huh? Perfect. Just like a coward."

"Oh shut up," Shigaraki growls. "You might think you scare me, but I'm done with you. I just wish you would've saved yourself instead of going after that Bakugou kid. He's the one I actually wanted."

"Oh, well excuse me for getting kidnapped. I'll try harder not to next time."

“This is going nowhere,” the marble villain says, stepping forward. “Dabi, please finish restraining him. We wouldn’t want our top act escaping, now, would we?”

Izuku grits his teeth behind his lips, tight enough to make his already pounding head throb harder. The knife girl springs forward eagerly and pushes over a chair; Dabi slams Izuku onto it with more force than necessary and fastens his hands behind his back.

“Hospitable bunch,” Izuku says under his breath, barely loud enough for *him* to hear. “This is great…”

“Ugh, it really sucks that we wound up with *you,”* Shigaraki says, four of his five fingers clenching around a glass of what *looks* like water. “I don’t even want anything to *do* with you.”

“Sucks to be you then, I guess,” Izuku says. “By the way, how about that bite, huh? Did it ever actually heal or nah?”

“Ooooo, low blow. I like it.”

“Shut up,” Shigaraki hisses, pointing a finger at him.

“Why did we even kidnap this guy anyway?” Dabi questions, coming around to the front of Izuku’s chair so he can look him in the eyes. “Honestly, this entire mission is completely beyond me…”

“Oh, don’t listen to them!” the knife girl chirps, bouncing forward. “I’m Toga Himiko, Izuchan! I’m so glad we kidnapped him, he’s so cute!”

Just for sake of playing the part, Izuku winks at her. Toga squeals and bounces, and Izuku swallows back the bile that springs into his throat.

“Ugh, yeah, gross, I’m gonna go now.” Dabi is already turning towards the door. “The device is set to shock him in another ten minutes. Just be sure to stand clear of the chair when that happens.”

“How shocking,” Izuku says, grinning and *really* fighting to keep the waver out of his voice. “I don’t know *watt* you’re talking about.”

“This guy’s hilarious!” Twice says, and then, in a different voice but same breath, “He’s incredibly annoying.”

“This is getting nowhere,” Mr. Compress says, tipping his hat and shaking his head. “Tragic, I was really hoping the show would go

somewhere by now…"

"Sorry to disappoint you," Izuku says without meaning it. "I'm a little too chained to a chair to do anything impressive. You'll have to excuse my kidnapped state."

"My, my, aren't you *the entertainer?"*

Chills go down Izuku's spine, and his eyes blow wide with shock. The ex-holders go completely silent in his head. He's heard this voice before, several times on several occasions. Never in person, and never in his *own body,* but he's heard it. He knows exactly who's behind it.

"Sensei." Shigaraki turns towards the television screen currently displaying the words, *[Transmission: In Progress]*. "I did what you asked. What now?"

"Yes, yes, you did," says the voice through the screen. *"You did wonderful, Shigaraki Tomura. I'm sorry you lost your own target in the midst of it, but believe me, this will all pay off."*

"It's him," Dai says, and his voice shakes. *"That's him, that's All Fo—"*

"I would like some time alone with the prisoner, if possible," All For One says leisurely, like they have all the time in the world. Who knows, on the villains' side of things, perhaps they do. *"Just enough time to have a little chat. It won't be long, I promise."*

"Awwww, but I wanted to hang out with him some more!" Toga whines, stomping her foot and pouting. "This is no fair."

Shigaraki slides off the barstool. "I'd keep from trying anything clever if I were you," Shigaraki says to Izuku, glaring at him. "You're in our hands now, remember. Your life, your future…from here on out, whatever happens to you will be determined by us."

With courage he doesn't have, Izuku smiles. "You sound pretty confident for someone who can't even decide what kind of person he wants to become, *Tenko Shimura."*

The look Shigaraki gives him is a mix of things. His shoulders tremble, his eyes narrow, and he spins on his heel and takes one step towards Izuku—

"Tomura, do not engage."

Shigaraki stops, head down, teeth gritted. “But Sensei—”

“Let him talk,” All For One says breezily, like they’re making plans for a picnic and not in the middle of a hostage situation. *“Let him spew whatever nonsense he likes while he still can. He won’t be doing it for long, I assure you.”*

Shigaraki stands there for a long moment, still trembling, but he doesn’t move towards Izuku again. He spins on his heel, keeps his head down, and vacates the room. Soon after follow the other villains, with Kurogiri taking up the rear.

“One moment, Kurogiri,” All For One says, and Kurogiri stops and turns towards the screen. *“My current state is a bit unstable. Would you mind…?”*

Kurogiri nods simply. “Consider it done.”

A portal opens a mere few feet away from Izuku, and out of it steps a man.

He’s different from the last time Izuku saw him. Even the most up to date version of him, the one he’d seen in Nana’s death, is different than the man standing before him now. This man has several tubes protruding from his skin that lead into a contraption strapped on his back, and he’s wearing a mask. All Izuku can see of his face is his mouth.

There’s no doubt about it, though. His aura is the same. That smile is the same.

“Hello, my boy,” All For One says, still smiling. “I’ve been waiting this moment for a long, long time.”

Izuku grits his teeth. His heart is pounding viciously against his chest, and the corners of his sight are turning black, but he doesn’t let his vulnerability (or his fear) show.

“Can’t say the same, unfortunately,” Izuku bites out.

All For One studies his face for a moment.

“I swear,” Nana says, voice a low growl, *“if you hurt this kid, I’m gonna drag myself back up from the dead just to murder you.”*

“You’re playin’ a dangerous game,” Yuko seethes. *“Watch what you do,*

All For One. You're treading on frickin' landmines here."

"If you will hear me," All For One says, and Izuku looks at him, "I would like to speak with you for a time, Midoriya."

Izuku sets his jaw, tight enough to cause pain. "I don't have a choice either way," he says, "so I'll listen."

All For One's smile grows. "Kurogiri," he says, raising a hand and waving it, "leave us. I'll call you back if need be."

Kurogiri nods, bows shortly, and warps himself out of the room, leaving Izuku and All For One behind. Alone.

With great care, All For One strides forward and kneels on the floor in front of Izuku. They're eye-level this way.

"I know you are the ninth wielder of One For All," All For One says, and there's something very soothing, very calming about his voice that Izuku *hates.* "Tomura spoke to me of an... *incident* at the USJ. The seven apparitions he saw...well...I find the coincidence a bit hard to believe."

Izuku says nothing.

"Every One For All user has one of those moments," All For One goes on. "A moment where they come to grasps with their borrowed power and see visions of the past holders. I find it odd that Tomura saw such a vision, but no matter…"

Wait, so he...doesn't know I can summon the past holders? He just thinks that stunt at the USJ was another random mechanic of One For All?

Izuku's heart feels ready to burst, but he takes in a breath.

...Maybe I can use that. Somehow.

"My dear child…" All For One's voice is gentle and calm, and he shakes his head slowly, as though he's genuinely saddened by his words. "You've seen so much in the short time you've had this Quirk. The world of heroes really is a terrible place."

Things are resurfacing now. Hearing All For One's voice, in the flesh, in *person,* is bringing back a lot of memories.

"The path of One For All is a road carved in tears and paved by the blood of its past holders," All For One continues, and Izuku

remembers Nana, he remembers Senshi, he remembers Aki, Kibo, Dai, Yuko—

Izuku grits his teeth and ducks his head.

“Or...do you not know?”

“Shut up,” Izuku says, voice barely a whisper. “I know enough.”

All For One looks *genuinely distressed,* and it makes Izuku want to puke. “Oh, my dear boy…”

“Shut up,” Izuku chokes out again.

“All Might never *told you,* did he?”

“S-Shut up.”

“The past holders of One For All...All Might never told you that I *killed all of them.”*

“Shut up!” Izuku snaps, and in the presence of the man who murdered the past holders, people Izuku has grown so close to in such a short amount of time, everything comes bubbing back. The tears spill over, but he keeps his head lowered and his teeth gritted. He won’t give All For One the satisfaction of witnessing his tears.

All For One lets out a long, heaving sigh. Out of the corner of his eye, Izuku sees him shaking his head. “The hero society really is unfair...to place such pain on such a young boy, a mere *child* at that…”

All For One reaches toward him, fingers gently touching Izuku’s chin. Izuku snaps his head to the other side, breathing raggedly. All For One takes his chin again, patient, gentle, and Izuku jerks away a second time. He can’t do it, he *can’t stand it.*

All For One isn’t upset, though. He isn’t angry with Izuku’s lack of cooperation. He settles further on the floor, endlessly patient, and Izuku has never wanted to scream so badly before in his life.

“I’m on your side, Midoriya, my boy,” All For One soothes, withdrawing his hand and settling both of them in his lap. “I want nothing more than to help you. But I cannot do so unless you allow me to.”

Izuku sinks his teeth into his bottom lips, hard enough to draw blood.

“My boy, please *listen,”* All For One says, and there’s a pleading edge to his tone that hadn’t been there before. It makes Izuku want to listen, and it makes him disgusted for the same reason.“I can *help you,”* All For One goes on gently, as though speaking to a small, scared child. “I’ve seen the things you’ve been through. I know your story. I’ve seen what people have done to you, the oppression you’ve been under…it hurts me, Midoriya, it really does. It hurts you, too, doesn’t it?”

Izuku takes in a ragged breath through his teeth.

All For One sits back, relaxed, but attentive. “I can help you,” All For One says again. “Midoriya, my dear boy, I *want* to help you. And all you have to do to be rid of this pain and torment, to end the cycle of blood and death and *pain* ...is relinquish One For All to me.”

Izuku’s head snaps up. His breath stutters. “W-What?”

“Give me One For All,” All For One repeats slowly, holding out his hand again as though to touch Izuku’s. “You must know by now that it is the one Quirk I cannot steal away from the wielder. One For All originated with me, and to me, it must return.”

“No,” Izuku blurts shakily. He doesn’t have to think about it. “No, I won’t.”

“Really?” All For One pauses, hand stilling mid-air. “After knowing what you know now, that all the previous wielders with exception of All Might died by my hand...you still choose to stand by this power?”

“You killed them,” Izuku says, and this may be the first time he’s actually *clicked* with this realization. “You *killed* them, and you want me to give you One For All. You want me to *give you* the power that they gladly died for.”

“They were heroes,” All For One says simply, “they were asking for it —”

“They weren’t just heroes,” Izuku snaps, interrupting All For One for the very first time. All For One’s face doesn’t chance. Izuku sucks in a sharp breath through his teeth, eyes burning, hands shaking behind his back.

“They were *people,”* Izuku strains. “They were people with names, with families, with hopes, with dreams, with ambitions...did you know that Aki loved to sing? Did you know that Dai never got the chance to

pick his own hero name? Did you know how scared they were when you killed them? Did you know that they *didn't want to die?"*

All For One doesn't waver. "They're gone," he says, "all of them. Who they were or what they wanted doesn't matter, does it? I'm asking you for *your* choice, my boy. Not the choices of those who are no longer with us. Will you—"

"I will not." Izuku balls his fists behind his back and keeps his eyes set on the villain's face. "You can do whatever you want to me, but I will *not* give you One For All."

"Hmm...I see."

All For One rises to his feet slowly, and Izuku watches his every move. "This really is a shame, Midoriya…" All For One says, tapping a small device by his shoulder. "I'd been hoping we could be friends…" He holds down a button and speaks into it, just barely loud enough for Izuku to hear. "Send in Toga, please. Make it fast."

All For One steps back, and Izuku's ears ring while his heart continues to pound. Toga, the crazy girl with the knives, what does All For One want with her—

"Deep breath," comes Nana's voice, and Izuku hadn't even realized he'd been holding his breath until he inhales deeply and his vision clears. *"You've gotta breathe."*

"I can't," Izuku says hoarsely, in the quietest voice he can. "Nana, I'm —I can't, I don't—I'm *terrified—"*

"It's going to be okay," Senshi says, and for once she isn't yelling. *"It's gonna be okay, kid, I promise you. You're gonna be just fine, you've just gotta keep breathing."*

Toga pokes her head through the door, smiles brightly, and skips inside. "What's up, boss man?" she asks, although her eyes are already fixated on Izuku.

"Ah, Toga, my dear, please check the timer on Midoriya's chains," All For One requests.

"Okay!" Toga sings, beaming brighter and prancing over. She peaks behind Izuku's chair, at his shackles, then raises her head to All For One again. "Forty seven seconds, going down!"

“Could you please raise the wattage?”

“Okay! How high?”

“It doesn’t matter as long as you do not kill or seriously maim him.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t *dream* of killing him!”

Izuku hears a gear clicking and feels Toga’s fingers brush against his wrist. It sends another chill down his spine.

“All done!”

Toga springs away from Izuku’s chair like it’s about to explode and prances back to All For One’s side. She brings her knuckles against her cheeks, beaming.

“I can’t wait!” she says, swaying back and forth like some kind of a psychopath. “This is going to be fantastic!”

Izuku has been mentally counting down from forty-seven. He’s at ten. He gets all the way down to three when the shock finally comes.

It’s more than Kaminari’s shock. It’s more than the first shock. The pain shoots through his arms and quickly surges through his entire body.

His vision goes white. His chest burns. He *screams.* Through the buzzing in his ears, through the sound of his own screaming, he hears others. Others only he can hear. They’re screaming with him.

“Let him go, you bastard—!”

“Stop it! He’s just a kid, stop it!”

“Leave him alone!”

“Coward, let him go!”

“I’ll kill you, I’m going to kill you *if you don’t stop it—!”*

“Quit it, cut it out!”

“Stop!”

All For One doesn’t stop it, and neither does Toga. The shock ends, and Izuku slumps forward, gasping for breath, fingers twitching, chest

burning. He can't even hold his head up anymore.

"Izuku, kiddo, hey, are you okay?"

"Dude, c'mon, dude, hey—"

"I'll kill him, I'm gonna kill him, I'm going to kill him—"

All For One approaches again, and when his fingers touch Izuku's chin, Izuku is too weak to jerk away. All For One looks him in the eyes through his mask, and something about his aura has changed. He isn't calm anymore. He's *holding back.*

"I'm truly sorry," All For One says, "but I really *do* want One For All. Things have continued this way for too long, an endless game of cat and mouse between the One For All holders and myself. The cycle has to end, one way or another, and whether that means you relinquish One For All to me or I kill you before that, well, I will not be swayed from my goal."

Izuku doesn't know how he does it, but he lifts his head the rest of the way and narrows his eyes. "I'll never give you One For All," he gasps. "If you really want to break the cycle so badly, you're going to have to kill me."

"Now now, I don't think there's any reason to jump straight to the extreme *just* yet." All For One touches his face gently, and Izuku doesn't have the strength to shake him off. "We'll see how your ideals have changed after you wear those chains for another day or two. You'd be surprised how quickly a person can switch sides."

Izuku's head is spinning. He's lost all capability to properly think at this point, but he doesn't let that stop him.

"I've imagined death so much it feels more like a memory," Izuku says simply with strength he doesn't have. "You're going to be disappointed, All For One."

"We'll see, my boy." All For One finally releases his face and rises to his feet. "We'll see. Toga, reset the wattage to its default and set the timer so it goes off every fifteen minutes. After that, please escort him to his cell."

Toga nods, and when All For One leaves, she dances forward.

While she unchains him from the chair and resets the device, Izuku

has time to breathe. And think.

This is it, then. This is it.

Izuku's arms swing limply by his sides. Both wrists are shackled, and chains drag the floor; on the left shackle is a simple device with a clock ticking down from fifteen.

"Come on, Izuchan!" Toga sings, taking his forearm and pulling him out of his chair. Izuku sways, and he *would* fall if it weren't for her holding him up. "I'll show you to your cell! It's not very cute, but it functions perfectly well!"

Izuku doesn't have a choice. He allows himself to bed led away, the tip of one of Toga's knives pressing between his shoulder blades. He can't dissociate, not when his ghost is so glued to his body like this, and trying to use One For All to escape at this point would be very, very stupid.

Hold out, is the only solution his pain-fogged mind can come up with. *Hold out. Hang in there. Make it. Survive.*

Stay alive.

Stay alive, Shouto pleads, racing faster with Uraraka as soon as Kirishima comes into view. *Stay alive.*

Stay alive, Iida begs as he runs towards the plaza, his phone still displaying Kirishima's message and his Quirk powering through his engines. *Stay alive.*

Stay alive, Toshinori thinks desperately while the heroes and the police discuss their next course of action centered around Yaoyorozu's tracking device and the polices' ongoing investigation. *Stay alive.*

Stay alive, Kouta repeats over and over again, staring out the window of his room. He has a folded letter in one hand. *Stay alive.*

Stay alive, Inko prays, hands folded, head bowed against them. There are two plates set on the dinner table, both untouched. *Stay alive.*

Stay alive, Izuku tells himself as he forces his feet to carry him forward. *Stay alive.*

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for your continued support.

Imma leave this here.

(For those who are here for the full warning: a character is shocked at high voltage by villains. There are no resulting visible injuries or descriptive wounds.)

That Would Be Enough

Chapter Summary

"That Would Be Enough" from Hamilton

"Just stay alive, that would be enough."

Chapter Notes

ART!!

Check out this awesome art of a scenario from chapter 20 by sapphiria-tehcl (WARNING FOR BLOOD/GORE/INJURY)

Thanks a bunch, Saph! :D Enjoy the chapter!

Also, another warning like the last chapter, but the final scenes of this chapter do get.... really intense. Still nothing past the T rating, but even so. With warnings same as the propr chapter, reader caution is advised. If you have any concerns, you can jump down to the "end notes" real fast and I'll give you a brief summary of the last few scenes dealing with Izuku.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shouto drops off Howler that evening, but declines Inko's offer to stay the night. "I appreciate it," Shouto says later that evening when he returns, "I really appreciate it, but, right now, I think I just…" He pauses, then sighs. "I need...I need time."

Inko nods feverishly. "I understand," she says. "I thought I would offer, just in case." She gets where he's coming from, of course. She doesn't know *exactly* what he's feeling, but she's in this situation just as he is, so she has a good idea. "Feel free to come back if you change your mind, alright? You have a key."

Shouto nods shakily, and Inko wants *so badly* to hug him, but holds back in consideration for his personal space. "Thank you," he says, bowing shortly. When he straightens up, he meets her eyes. "Are...are you alright, Inko-san?"

Now there's a question. Inko smiles softly and looks down at the ground for a long moment. Howler nuzzles her side, and she reaches down and strokes his head gently.

“I’m fine, dear,” she says, and she doesn’t mean it, but she has to say it. For his sake. “Izuku is strong, and the heroes are seeking him out now. He’ll be alright.” She tells that last part to herself more than to Shouto. She needs the reassurance, too.

Shouto nods. “He’s going to be okay,” he says, and his voice carries a kind of certainty that hadn’t been there before. “Don’t worry. Midoriya will be fine.”

Inko blinks at him, unsure of where his sudden confidence had come from. In the back of her mind, she has a suspicion, but says nothing of it. Rather, she nods, and shortly thereafter, Shouto turns and heads out, leaving Inko and Howler behind.

Inko spends the remainder of the evening doing useless things. Tidying up the couch needlessly, straightening the bookshelf, sweeping. About mid-way through her dusting of one of the shelves, she recalls that Howler hasn’t eaten, and heads into the kitchen to prepare his dinner.

“Howler?” Inko calls, shaking Howler’s food bowl once it’s full. “Howler, come eat.”

Howler usually comes running when Izuku gets him his food in the evening (the thought sends a spike of pain through her heart), but now he’s nowhere to be seen. Inko sets the food bowl down on the floor and heads down the hall, peering into rooms as she passes.

“Howler? Howler, where—”

She turns the corner and stops short. Howler is laying on the porch, just in front of the door, and he doesn’t even raise his head when Inko steps towards him.

Inko kneels by him and runs a hand through the dog’s coat. Howler raises his head now, just for a moment, then drops it to the ground again.

“I know,” Inko says thickly. Her facade finally breaks, and the first of many tears begin to fall. “I miss Izuku, too.”

The fact that Howler won’t eat, the fact that things are so *wrong* right now, is a bit more than Inko can take. She gets to her feet again, grabs her duster and, in a moment of desperation, she heads inside Izuku’s room.

It's lined with All Might merchandise, of course, but it reminds her so horribly of Izuku that it leaves a true, burning ache in her chest. She doesn't think she'll be able to look at anything All Might-related ever again without thinking of her son.

Stepping into this room now after all that's happened, it...it hurts. But she's run out of pointless tasks to do in the living room, and she really, really needs some way to occupy herself.

So she begins dusting the shelves, being mindful to carefully move everything out of the way beforehand. When she's done with the lower shelves, she moves to the higher ones, the ones that she can't reach without standing on her tip-toes, and even then all she can do is move the feather duster across the surface without seeing what she's doing.

Her eyes are burning again, and it's not because of the dust. She'd come in here to occupy herself despitethe current situation, but coming in here had been a mistake. She should have known. She should have, and now her eyes are burning and the tears are falling again—

She knocks something off the top shelf, and when it hits the floor with a dull *thump,* Inko is the one who winces, immediately reaching down to pick it up. It's black and covered in dust, so it hasn't been touched in a long time—

Inches before reaching it, she pauses.

And then she picks it up.

"Here we are!" Further down the hall is a solid wooden door with a small, barred window near the top. Toga undoes the lock with a keyring she whips from her sweater pocket, then swings open the door. "Like I said, it isn't cute, but it does its job!"

She shoves him inside, and on unsteady legs, Izuku falls. He catches himself on his hands, but his fuzzy head makes it hard to recover from it right away. The air is musky, but breathable, so he doesn't complain.

Toga steps into the room behind him, shutting the door. "Come on, Izuchan! We have to get your chains fixed!"

She drags him to his feet again, and Izuku raises his head and surveys

the room. There are rings bolted to the floor (no doubt to lock the ends of his chains in), an empty storage shelf against the far wall, and —

Izuku's eyes blow wide. "Ragdoll?"

Her head snaps up, and she blinks several times, her pupils slowly dilating. Her eyes have always looked odd due to the nature of her Quirk, but right now, she looks more disoriented than anything.

"Kitten?" Ragdoll gasps. She's battered and bruised, wearing what looks like a hospital gown, and her hair spills over her shoulders, tangled and bedraggled with a streak of blood through it. "W-What are you doing here?"

Izuku doesn't even have the chance to open his mouth.

"Here!" Toga grabs one of Izuku's chains and yanks him to the floor unexpectedly. Izuku hits the ground, wincing, and Toga makes quick work of snapping the end of his first chain into one of the rings bolted onto the floor. "Aaaand the other one!" She grabs the other chain, yanks, and does the same thing on his opposite side. "There, all done!" She stands and brushes her hands together needlessly, looking much too proud of herself. "See you, Izuchan!"

She skips back towards the door, steps outside, and slams and locks it behind her. After that, she peers through the barred window, blows Izuku a kiss, then spins on her heel and heads off. Izuku waits until her footsteps have completely faded before he turns, urgently, to Ragdoll.

"Are you okay?" she asks desperately as he opens his mouth to say the same thing. "Are you hurt? You look—" She stops for a moment, looks him over, then meets his eyes again. "You're not okay."

Izuku would berate himself for being so transparent in any other situation, but considering he'd been literally electrocuted, he figures he can cut himself some slack. He shakes his head, then stops when his vision tilts.

"I'll live," he says, then turns back to her. "What about you? Are you okay?"

Ragdoll blinks at him slowly, then smiles faintly. "They knocked me out on the way in here," she says, raising her hand and touching her bloody temple gently. "I'm a bit out of sorts, but it's nothing I can't

handle. You don't have to worry about me, Kitten, I'm used to this kind of stuff by now."

Izuku bites his lip. "Why are you here?" he asks; in the back of his mind, he remembers the countdown timer leading to his next electrocution, but he doesn't think about it right now. "They kidnapped you, do you…?"

Ragdoll shakes her head. "I've got no idea why," she says, looking down at her legs. She's chained similarly to Izuku (minus the shocker of course), sitting cross-legged. "I guess being able to say you successfully kidnapped a pro hero already puts you on a higher level than most villains, though, right?"

Izuku swallows hard and looks the other way. "It's not worth hurting someone over," he murmurs under his breath. Some of the pounding in his head has gone down, and he's finally feeling normal again, though he know it won't last. "Nothing is worth hurting someone over."

Ragdoll smiles softly and turns away. Then, she does a double-take.

"Kitten, what's that?"

She doesn't point, but she doesn't have to. Her eyes are fixated on Izuku's wrist—more specifically, at the device steadily counting down from six.

"I, ahh...I have this Quirk," Izuku says slowly. "Actually, no, I have—I have two Quirks. One of them is basically a mutation stock-piler Quirk that developed when I was fifteen, and the other one I was born with lets me eject my ghost out of my body."

Ragdoll blinks slowly. Very slowly. It's kind of unsettling. "You can...eject your ghost…?"

"Something like that." Izuku raises a hand to rub the back of his neck, and his chain barely gives him the slack he needs to do so. "It's, it's pretty weird I know, sorry—"

Ragdoll is already shaking her head. "I don't think so," she says, and she smiles faintly. "That's actually really unique. I don't think I've ever heard of something like that—" She stops short, and her dazed eyes go wide. "Wait," she says, swinging around to meet his eyes again, "that means you can leave, right? You can get out of her safely, without the villains even realizing—"

Izuku shakes his head, and Ragdoll stops. “It’s more complicated than that,” Izuku says softly. Out of the corner of his eye, he sees the clock. Four. “There are two reasons why I can’t just, y’know, *go ghost* and leave.”

Ragdoll bites her lip. “I’m listening.”

“First of all, I have a distance limit,” Izuku says, and he remembers the painful sensation of his ghost being forcefully snapped back into his body after the latter was whisked away in Kurogiri’s gate. “If I go beyond that, my spirit gets forcefully yanked back into my body.”

Ragdoll nods in understanding. “And?”

“And, pain keeps me in my body,” Izuku says. Two and a half. “If I’m in pain, I’m too much a part of my body to actually *leave* it. There have been a couple times I’ve been able to force myself out of it, but it’s...it’s not good.”

Ragdoll falls silent for a time.

“Kitten, *what is that device on your wrist?”*

One minute.

“It...it gives me a controlled shock,” Izuku answers, and saying it for himself makes it more *real.* “It’s, it’s not as bad as it could be, but—”

“Oh *gods.”* Ragdoll’s eyes are wide, and her breath comes quicker. “Izuku, I—I’m—”

“It’s not your fault, i-it’s okay—”

Ragdoll says nothing for a time, though she opens her mouth once or twice as though to do so. She grits her teeth and squeezes her eyes shut, fists balled and trembling.

“I’m supposed to be a *hero,”* Ragdoll strains, voice cracking on the last word. “I’m supposed to be a *hero,* but there’s nothing—there’s nothing I can do, I’m—I’m completely *powerless,* Izuku, I’m—I’m *sorry.”*

Thirty seconds. Izuku doesn’t know how to respond to that, so he says nothing and counts down with the clock. Twenty seconds. Ten seconds. Five. Ragdoll must have been counting, too, because she raises her head and meets his eyes. There’s more awareness in her gaze now.

“Izuku—”

The shock comes. It’s not as bad as the first time, when the wattage had been higher and the duration longer, but it’s still a shock. He snaps his teeth together to keep back his cry of pain, and he hears Ragdoll talking to him, as well as the other holders of One For All, but it all sounds like muffled background noise to his ears.

It ends slowly, but it *does* end. He opens his eyes again, blinking way the blur, and when he turns to the right, he sees Ragdoll reaching towards him, eyes panicked and worried.

Izuku reaches towards her, too. The slack of his chain runs out quick, but he has just enough to touch Ragdoll’s hand, and she wraps her fingers around his and squeezes gently.

“We’re going to get out of here,” Ragdoll promises, squeezing his hand tighter. “I promise you, I’ll do whatever it takes to get you out safely.”

“You have to get out, too,” Izuku pants, and his voice shakes and cracks more than once. “Mandalay, Tiger, Pixie-bob, K-Kouta…they all need you.”

Ragdoll smiles at him. Her eyes shimmer with unshed tears, and Izuku kind of wants to cry, too. “Then we’ll get out together,” she says firmly. “We’ll get out together. I promise.”

The promise gives Izuku something to hold onto, a hope that he hadn’t had before. Something to look forward to. The promise—the hope—of a brighter future. Something beyond the now.

He nods. “We will,” he reaffirms, just to assure her. “We will. I know we will.”

He hears footsteps. Ragdoll perks up some, head swinging around towards the door, and she and Izuku both watch, breath held.

The door unlocks, and in walks Dabi. He looks first to Ragdoll, then to Izuku, absentmindedly pulling the door shut behind him. “I’m not here to talk,” Dabi says, crossing the room. “I’m just turning off the shocker for a while.”

Izuku’s head snaps up. “Turning it off?”

Dabi shrugs. “That’s what the boss said,” he answers. He inserts a small key into the mechanism snapped to Izuku’s shackle; the screen

which had been steadily counting down again goes black. “He says he doesn’t want to destroy you completely before he can get another few words in.”

Izuku bares his teeth behind his lips. “Makes sense.”

“You’re *disgusting,”* Ragdoll seethes, and Dabi turns to leave, unconcerned. “You’re doing this to a *child* who has done *nothing* to you. What do you seek to gain from all this? He’s done nothing wrong, he doesn’t—”

“I don’t really care,” Dabi says, looking at the two of them over his shoulder. “I’m just following orders. You.” He raises a finger towards Izuku. “If you try escaping, we’re turning on the device again, so for your own good, don’t even think about it.”

Izuku has *already* thought about this, has already run the scenarios through his head. While he’s sure he can break out of his chains with One For All and, furthermore, break down the door of this place, there’s still navigating the area to find their way out, and this place is crawling with villains. Not to mention All For One…

“For now, just enjoy the time you have without that thing shocking you,” Dabi says, turning and making for the door again. “I dunno what the boss wants with you, but he seemed pretty upset last I talked to him.”

Izuku says nothing, and there are a few reasons why he doesn’t, although the biggest reason is the fact that he *really* doesn’t want to say anything that would make Dabi change his mind about leaving the shocker off. Even if it’s All For One’s orders, he doesn’t know how Dabi would react when angered.

Dabi leaves, and Izuku lets out the breath he’d been holding and meets Ragdoll’s eyes with a fragile, pained kind of smile.

“We’ll get out of here,” Izuku breathes. The screen usually displaying the countdown is still blank, and just that alone is enough to give him some semblance of hope.

Ragdoll nods. “Yeah. We will.”

“I’ll be speaking with the press with the principal,” Aizawa says at their meeting, folding his hands together. He’s usually quiet to begin with, but lately, he’s been even more reserved. It sets Toshinori on

edge. “In the meantime, the rest of you will be carrying out the invasion at the location the police scouted.”

The rest of the meeting is simply them going over what they’ve already established at earlier meetings; the police found a bar located downtown where one of the villains had been seen entering and leaving, and that’s their main point of attack. A secondary group will be targeting another building, the one Yaoyorozu’s tracking device led to.

“Didn’t the boy have a medical bracelet?” Midnight asks, threading her fingers together. “I remember it bring brought up. If the signal is lost, it should alert Recovery Girl to his location, correct?”

“We already located the bracelet,” Mic answers, shaking his head. “Found it in some rockslide back up at the training camp. We can’t pin down his *exact* location, but with the polices’ investigation and Yaoyorozu’s tracking device, we have a pretty good idea of where to look.”

“Everyone, please, do your best,” Nedzu says, folding his paws (...hands…?) together and surveying the group with great care. “Remember, rescuing Midoriya is our top priority. Even if all we can do is get him out of there, even if we cannot apprehend the villains, ensuring his safety is the most important course of action.”

He pauses, takes in a breath, then raises his head towards Aizawa. “The press conference will commence in a few hours,” he informs. “You will be with me. As for everyone else, please be ready with your assigned attack position. We’ll have Midoriya back safe and sound by daybreak.”

Everyone is agreement, and the meeting breaks. Aizawa is the first to actually leave the conference room, and after a bit of hesitation, Toshinori rises from his own chair and follows him out of the room and down the hall.

“Aizawa?”

Aizawa redoubles his pace, and Toshinori has to jog until he catches up. Aizawa says nothing, and Toshinori takes in a breath, contemplating what to say.

“...Aizawa—”

“I let Midoriya go back to Mandalay,” Aizawa says curtly, head facing

forward. “I should have told him to go back to the facility. It wasn’t his responsibility to relay that message to Mandalay. It shouldn’t have fallen on him.”

Toshinori is slammed with a wave of guilt, a quiet *I wasn’t there, I couldn’t do anything,* but he does his best to shake it off. This isn’t about him right now.

“I doubt Midoriya would think that,” Toshinori says.

“What Midoriya thinks doesn’t *matter,”* Aizawa cuts in sharply. “He’s just a kid. It wasn’t his job to go to Mandalay, and yet it befell on him to do it anyway. What happened is because I had a lapse in judgement. Midoriya shouldn’t have had anything to do with it.”

Toshinori opens his mouth to say something else, but refrains. He knows nothing he says now will change Aizawa’s convictions, and vice versa.

“Just bring him home,” Aizawa says after a pause. “Get him back here where he belongs. We’ll do our best to keep the world distracted with that press conference, so get in there and do your thing.”

Toshinori has already resolved to do this, of course he has, but Aizawa’s words only further fuel that determination. He nods.

“Will do. Good luck.”

“Yeah, you too.”

They have a way to rescue Midoriya now. Kirishima explained it to them yesterday: Yaoyorozu planted a tracking device on one of the Nomu creatures that the League unleashed into the forest, and if she’s willing to make another GPS to track the signal, then they’ll be able to find Midoriya’s location, plain and simple.

“The problem is,” Kirishima had said, rubbing the back of his neck, “I haven’t actually, y’know... *asked* Yaoyorozu yet. She’s being discharged from the hospital tonight, so I’m going to go see her a little later on and ask, but until then, we’re pretty in the dark.”

That was their decision. It wasn’t optimal, but it was all they had at that point.

“I’ll add her to the group chat,” Kirishima had said, “once I talk it over

with her and get her decision. There's a *chance* she'll rat us out to the teachers, though, so...be prepared, I guess?"

Iida, Shouto, and Uraraka had exchanged glances.

"If she does tell the teachers," Iida said, "then I suppose it can't be helped. If all of you are still in this, I am."

"I'm still in," Uraraka said without hesitation.

"Me too," Shouto said, raising a hand.

"'Kay, in which case, I'll go ahead over to the hospital and ask her," Kirishima had said, stuffing his phone into his pocket. "I was gonna do it tomorrow, but there's no point in stalling, right? Might as well get it over with."

They'd nodded their agreement and departed, each their own way.

That was yesterday.

And now they're here at the plaza outside the hospital where they had planned to meet. Shouto, Kirishima, Iida, and Uraraka have been here for some time; now it's just a matter of whether or not Yaoyorozu will be joining them.

"She said she didn't know," Kirishima says, rubbing the back of his neck and scrolling through his phone. "I added her to the group chat and everything, but I don't know whether or not she'll actually show up."

Shouto stares off into space. Going after Midoriya now feels very surreal, and despite Uraraka's proclamation yesterday, about how they shouldn't blame themselves regardless of the situation, Shouto can't shake his guilt. He tries to, but he can't. He hadn't even felt this numb when Midoriya was nearly *stabbed* to death. Maybe it's because then, Midoriya had been in the hospital, recovering. Now, Shouto has absolutely no idea where Midoriya is, or even what state he's in.

Just to have something else to do, he pulls his phone out of his pocket and scrolls through his messages. There's nothing from Midoriya (obviously), but his friends had been speaking with Yaoyorozu through their group message.

["THE ROCK" HAS ADDED "YAOYOROZU" TO CHATROOM "INSERT CLEVER TITLE HERE"]

[Yaoyorozu]
I spoke with Kirishima earlier regarding everything, and you're going to need to give me time to think things over.

[The Rock]
I mean, take as much time as you want, but we're on a time crunch. We have to save Midoriya as soon as possible.

[Gravity Falls]
Please, Momo. Even if you don't want to come along yourself, at least give us a GPS so we can go. Deku could be really hurt right now, we have to get him out of there.

[Yaoyorozu]
I want to save Midoriya as much as the next person, believe me, but please. I really need time to think about this. I'll meet you all outside the hospital tonight at 9pm with my decision.

[The Rock]
Thanks.

[Speedy Gonzales]
Thank you for hearing us out, Yaoyorozu. We will respect your decision either way.

[Yaoyorozu]
Thank you.
Also, this may not be the time or place, but I have to ask.

[The Rock]
Go ahead, we could use some kind of distraction right about now.

[Yaoyorozu]
Why do you all have such…odd nicknames?

[Gravity Falls]
Oh, that's Deku. He likes doing goofy stuff like that in the group chat.

[Speedy Gonzales]
Indeed. Although, he only gave mine to me recently.

[Gravity Falls]
I'm sure he'll give you one after we rescue him. He likes giving people nicknames.

[Yaoyorozu]
...Alright, then.

That was the last message, sent at 6pm. Almost three whole hours ago.

"Man, I really hope she comes." Kirishima has been pacing for the past while now, and his restless energy is making Shouto even more antsy. "I guess if she doesn't want to help us we could always find a way to look at the police files and figure out where—"

"No," Iida cuts in, shaking his head. "No, that's—that's too far, Kirishima. If Yaoyorozu declines, we'll find another—"

The double doors open, and all heads snap up. Yaoyorozu steps out of the hospital, a patch of gauze taped on her left temple, hair done up in a high ponytail behind her head.

She looks at each of them in turn, chewing on her bottom lip. Wordlessly, she heads down the steps towards them, and they move forward to meet her halfway.

"...So?" Uraraka asks, wringing her hands together. "What's your decision, Momo?"

Yaoyorozu takes in a deep breath through her nose. "...I'm coming with you," she says.

"Wait, really!?" Kirishima shouts—he's hushed immediately by Iida and Yaoyorozu, and he says, quieter, "You're serious? You're coming with us?"

"Half of the reason is because I want to be there in case you decide to engage in combat with the villains," Yaoyorozu says sternly. "Rescue missions like this, they're...I won't lie. They're impractical. That's why, if the situation makes a turn for the worst, I'm calling off the entire operation. That is my one condition."

"It won't come down to that," Iida says firmly. "If it *does* end up making a turn for the worst, you can pull us from the situation, but it will not come down to that. I assure you."

Yaoyorozu looks at him for a long moment, then reaches into her dress pocket and pulls out a boxy, rectangular device and holds it out for the rest of them to see.

"This will lead us to Midoriya," she says; the others crowd around to

look earnestly. “Right now, the device is picking up signals from Kamino Ward. It’s a bit of a ride, so we should hurry and get down to the train station—”

“Oy.”

They turn in unison—Shouto, Iida, Uraraka, Kirishima, and Yaoyorozu—to face the new arrival. Bakugou walks up to them, hands in his pockets, expression oddly preserved.

Something spikes in Shouto’s chest at the sight of him. Something ugly. “What do you want?”

Bakugou’s face doesn’t change. Neither does his tone. “I wanna go with you.”

“Are you serious?” Kirishima asks, blinking once, then twice. “Dude, I don’t think that’s a good idea, honestly. Midoriya *really* doesn’t like you, and I’m pretty sure you hate him, so why would you—”

“I’m not asking for your permission,” Bakugou snaps furiously. “I said I want to go.”

Shouto doesn’t know why, but everything has been building up to this moment. They’re all restless, they’re all still reeling from recent events, they’re all still suffering the loss of their friend, but Shouto can’t handle it. After seeing Endeavor in the hospital, not sleeping, being tortured by memories of Midoriya’s flickering, scarred form…

“Bakugou, now *isn’t the time,”* Iida says, shaking his head. “We’ve already discussed our plan without you, you can’t barge your way in here and expect us to welcome you with open arms.”

“I want to go!” Bakugou yells, too loudly. Yaoyorozu and Kirishima try to shush him, but it does nothing. “Why the hell is it alright for *you* to go after Deku and not me, huh!? If you don’t take me with you, I’m gonna—”

Shouto swings around and punches Bakugou in the face.

Hard.

“Todoroki—!” Iida says sharply. Bakugou stumbles back, holding his face with one hand, but doesn’t fall.

Shouto doesn’t know why he’s so angry. He doesn’t know why

everything is bubbling up and overflowing now. He doesn't know why. He doesn't know why. He doesn't know why it had to be *Midoriya of all people.*

"Why do you suddenly care about Midoriya!?" Shouto demands, voice breaking at the end. "After everything you've put him through, after what happened in the finals, *why are you trying to play hero and save him!?"*

"Todoroki, c-calm down," Uraraka tries, reaching out. "Please, this isn't—this isn't a good time to be fighting—"

"He *saved* you!" Shouto yells, heedless to Uraraka's words. Iida's arms hook beneath his, pulling him back, and it's only now he realizes he'd been advancing. "He *saved* you after all the hell you put him through! Why are you pretending like you care about him now!?"

"Todoroki, please—!"

"You're happy he's gone, aren't you!?" Shouto struggles against Iida's hold now, chest full of something ugly, something burning, something he hates. " You're *glad* the villains took him!"

"Enough!"

Shouto's head clears, finally. Iida is still holding him back, Uraraka and Kirishima are holding hands out to him, worried, and Yaoyorozu is nearby, eyes wide.

The most startling part of this all may be the fact that Bakugou hasn't retaliated.

"...I'm alright." Shouto shakes Iida's arms off him, shuts his eyes, and takes in a long breath. "I'm sorry."

"Yeah, don't do that again," Kirishima says, eying him. "We're all on edge enough as it is, we can't go attacking each other like that."

"I know." Shouto doesn't want to—the *thing* inside him hasn't quite died yet—but he raises his head towards Bakugou. "I'm sorry—"

"Don't apologize to me," Bakugou snaps, lowering his hand from his face. It's hard to pin a finger on his expression. "I have a few choice words for the League of frickin' Idiots," Bakugou goes on. "If you don't want me there, whatever, but I'm going in either way, even if I have to go alone."

The already established group takes a moment to look at each other, exchanging meaningful glances and unspoken declarations.

"...I don't like this," Uraraka says, shaking her head. "Bakugou, you've...you've done so much to Deku, and...I don't think he'd want you to be there."

Bakugou says nothing.

"On the other hand," Iida says, stepping up beside Uraraka, "you could help us. You're rash, but you're not an idiot. As long as you don't engage combat with the villains…"

He pauses, looks at Uraraka, then at Yaoyorozu, then at Shouto, then finally at Kirishima. In unison, they turn to Bakugou.

"...You can come," Iida says finally. "However, if at any point I think you can't control your impulse, you're backing out. That is my condition."

Bakugou nods. "I get it," he says lowly. "So, are we gonna go now or what?"

Shouto doesn't know why, but something about Bakugou has changed. Something about his mien is completely different than before, and Shouto can't quite put his finger on *why*.

Either way, though, he decides it doesn't matter. Whatever else he has to say to Bakugou, he can say later. After Midoriya is safe.

The chains aren't even the worst of it. Izuku sits on the floor in his prison cell, knees drawn against his chest and arms wrapped around them. The mechanism on his wrist still shows a blank screen, but sometimes, he imagines the numbers there, counting down, which is almost, *almost* just as bad as being shocked. The ends of his chains are bolted to the floor, keeping him there; he barely has enough slack to reach up toward his neck and touch his bell.

It's been hours since the device was turned off. Izuku's spirit doesn't feel nearly as attached to his body as it did before, and he thinks, briefly, that he could dissociate if he wanted to. Not that he wants to; he doesn't have a solid enough plan to risk an escape right now.

Ragdoll is still awake, though her eyes are dazed again. She has some kind of a head injury, judging by the dried blood on her temple and

that glassy look in her gaze. He wishes she could get some sleep, but at the same time, with a head injury, it probably isn't the smartest idea.

Still.

"Are you okay?" Izuku asks.

They've been in silence for the past hour or so, so she jumps, but calms down quickly. "I'm alright," she says, nodding as though to reassure herself. She shifts positions, and her chains clink together. "I promise, I'm alright."

Izuku is about to say something else (call her out on her bluff, perhaps) when he hears the locks sliding back from the door. Ragdoll's head snaps up towards it immediately, and both she and Izuku watch in torturous anticipation.

Dabi swings open the door, the keyring still dangling on one finger. "The boss wants a word with you," he says, nodding his head towards Ragdoll. He steps into the room, pulls the door shut behind him, then approaches. "And he told me to turn on the shocker again while I was here."

The words spike a fear in Izuku's chest that he *doesn't like at all,* but he doesn't let that show. He holds his breath while Dabi resets the contraption, then lets the breath go when the red, digital numbers begin counting down from fifteen once again.

It's back to this.

"Alright." Dabi unlocks Ragdoll's chains from the floor now, first the left, then the right. "Just don't do anything stup—"

Ragdoll dives for Izuku and wraps her arms around his shoulders tightly. Izuku flinches at first and goes tense (of course he does), but then, he settles his arms around her and hugs her back.

"It'll be okay," she whispers, close to his ear. "Stay strong. You'll be okay."

She has to go when Dabi yanks on her chains, but the short embrace has a lasting effect. The timer counts down from fifteen while Dabi and Ragdoll cross the room, and with the slam of a door and the turning of a lock, they're gone.

Izuku pulls his knees against his chest again and wraps his arms around them. He takes in a deep breath, holds it, lets it go, the repeats the process once. Then twice. Again. And again. For several minutes.

"You doing okay there?" Dai asks cautiously. It's the first time any of the ex-holders have spoken in a while.

Izuku nods, but he doesn't even buy it himself, so he doubts Dai and the others do. "I'm okay," he says, resting his head against his knees. "I'm okay…"

"Like hell you are," Yukō calls him out, which *doesn't help. "Just…just do what Ragdoll said. Stay strong, boyo. The heroes are gonna come get you out of here, I know they will."*

Izuku takes in a shuddering breath. "I-I know that," he says, squeezing his legs tighter. "I-I just, right now, I'm…"

"Yeah, you don't have to explain yourself, kid," Senshi says, *"we get it. You're fine, don't worry."*

Izuku takes in another breath and glances at the mechanism. "Twelve minutes," Izuku murmurs as he begins counting down, balling his hands into fists and burying his face into his knees again.

The ex-holders fall completely silent, and Izuku sits there alone for the remainder of the time until his shock.

And then it happens. He rides it out, teeth gritted, and when it's over he's left gasping and panting, his nerves still twitching and convulsing and his head full of lead. It isn't as bad now as it'd been at first; he's gotten somewhat used to the sensation, and the wattage isn't as high as it'd been before, but still. It's just enough to keep him grounded in his body. *Just tauntingly* enough.

"Hey, hey kid, you okay?"

Izuku takes in a breath through his nose and nods shakily. "I'm…about as okay as I *can* be, considering… *everything,"* he breaths, letting his head fall against his knees again. "I'm…I'm scared, but…I'm just…I'm just glad I'm not alone." Now with Ragdoll gone, he feels more alone than ever before; he doesn't know what he'd do without the ex-holders' comforting voices.

"Hell yeah *you're not alone."*

“We’re here, sweetheart. You’re going to be alright.”

“Kibō’s right, man, you’re gonna be fine.”

“Just hang in there, buddy, okay? Help is on its way, I know it is.”

“Just stand strong, kiddo, and we’ll be here to stand strong with you.”

Mirai doesn’t say anything.

The ex-holders’ presence helps *tremendously,* and while he can’t reach out and touch them, while he can’t see them, he can hear them. He can feel them within him, and that’s enough right now. He’ll gladly take every comfort he can get.

The timer resets to fifteen, and Izuku begins counting down again. It’s the most tedious, most twisted thing he’s ever done so far, counting down the seconds until he’s electrocuted, so he tries not to think about it too much. Too much thought makes him feel like he’s slowly losing his mind.

Ten minutes pass. Two minutes. Izuku hears footsteps approaching from down the hall, and shortly thereafter, Toga swings herself in front of the door, beaming brightly through the barred window.

“Hi!” Toga chirps, grabbing the bars of the small window peering in. “How’s it going, cutie?”

Izuku is a bit preoccupied with the lingering *49, 48, 47, 46* counting down in his head. He still has a few minutes left to go (he thinks—he kind of lost count when Toga pranced into the room), but, still. It’s distracting.

“Good news!” Toga whips a pair of keys from her sweater pocket, jams them into the lock, and swings open the cell door. “The boss wants to talk to you again, and *I* get to take you to him!”

She prances into the cell and, without getting too close, peers at the timer. “Oh, nearly time!” she sings, spinning around. The keyring jingles in her hand. “Here we go! You’re so much cuter when you’re unmoving on the floor, Izuchan!”

“Thanks, I gu—”

The shock comes sooner than he expected, and he rides out the wave with gritted teeth, tense muscles, and balled fists. When it’s over, he

slumps, his hair falling in front of his face and sweat running down his neck.

“Perfect!” Toga sings, and she dances forward again, her keyring jingling. “And nooooooow, I can take you to Boss Man without you running off!”

She unlocks one of the bolts keeping the chains to the floor, then moves to the other one and unlocks that, too. The chains are still attached to Izuku’s shackles, and the shackles are still very much so clamped around his wrists, but at least he’s not bolted to the floor anymore.

“C’mon, Izuchan!” Toga takes him by the forearm and drags him up to his feet. She deposits the keyring in her sweater pocket and replaces it with a knife, which she presses against Izuku’s back between his shoulder blades. “Don’t even think about running off, either. Not only would I be really sad, but I’d have to kill you, which I don’t think you’d like very much.”

Izuku goes along with it as she pushes him down the hall, her blade cool against his back. “Yeah, I can’t say I’d enjoy getting killed by you very much.”

Toga giggles, and it makes him want to tear his hair out. “You’re so cute, Izuchan!” she says, bumping shoulders with him intentionally. “It’d be *fantastic* if you saw me the same way, don’t you think? We could have *so much fun together.”*

She presses the blade against his back further, and if his spirit hadn’t been so glued to his body, he would’ve quite literally jumped out of his skin.

“Yeah, um, I don’t know what to think of you,” Izuku says, and it’s not what he *really* thinks, he just doesn’t want to insult the person who has a knife so close to his spinal cord. “I really don’t know.”

Toga beams and cackles again. “It’s not an insult!” she says, the tip of her blade sharp against his back. “I’ll take it!”

They head back into the main room, the one Izuku had originally warped into when he first arrived. All For One is already there, standing and facing Izuku and Toga when they arrive. Beside him is Dabi, restraining a glaring, furious Ragdoll.

Something is wrong. All For One is here, Ragdoll is here, Izuku is

here, but why? If All For One wanted to talk to Izuku again, why drag Ragdoll into it? She doesn't have anything to do with what's going on here, so why—

Oh.

Oh.

"Welcome back, Izuku, my boy," All For One greets, taking a step towards him. Izuku has to resist the urge to flinch back. "I'm sorry about our harsh treatment towards you, but we really do not have much of a choice—"

"What are you doing?" Izuku demands, but his words lose their impact when his voice cracks and shakes. *"What are you doing?"*

All For One looks first at Izuku, then turns his head towards Ragdoll, restrained by Dabi. "Her Quirk fascinated me," All For One says, turning back towards Izuku again. "An all-seeing Quirk that can see everyone within a broad range...a lovely trinket to collect, don't you think?"

"You—"

"Kitten, whatever he says, don't listen to him," Ragdoll tells him, eyes set on All For One menacingly. "He's a liar and a murderer, don't do what he wants—"

"Bold words for someone in your predicament," All For One says, turning to her. "Are you really in a position to be making demands like that, my dear?"

Ragdoll only glares.

"Very well," All For One says, raising a hand and twirling a finger. "Toga, if you would."

Toga shifts, and Izuku hears something click behind him. The mechanism. Ragdoll's eyes blow wide, and she lurches forward, though Dabi pulls her back again right away.

"No, *don't!"* Ragdoll shouts, *pleads.* "Do whatever you want to me, but don't hurt him! Please!"

Izuku can barely hear Ragdoll's voice over the blood in his ears and his roaring heartbeat. In his mind's eye he sees the digital clock, but

he can't decide what numbers are there. He can't see it.

The shock comes unexpectedly. It's worse than before, but it's the surprise of it that really gets him. He cuts his sharp cry short by snapping his teeth together, but it's hard to keep his teeth clenched when he wants so badly to scream.

When it's over, he's on his knees, and Ragdoll is screeching and cursing and thrashing against Dabi's hold.

"He doesn't have anything to do with this! He's just a *kid,* you don't have to do this to him! Let him go!"

"I don't think you understand," All For One says, approaching Izuku slowly. Izuku recovers quicker now than he did the first time this happened, but he still hasn't gotten his breath back. "This child has *everything* to do with it."

Ragdoll stops thrashing, but she looks angrier than Izuku ever saw her, and she glares daggers into All For One's back even after he's turned away.

"Unpleasant, isn't it?" All For One says slowly, kneeling in front of Izuku again. "Being shocked like that."

Izuku grits his teeth harder, trying to will his head to stop pounding.

"I hope you enjoyed what few hours you had without it," All For One continues. "You know, if you show a bit of cooperation, I might even consider removing the device altogether. How does that sound?"

Izuku hates that he wants to. He hates that he wants to say yes, he hates that he wants to give in, he hates that he wants to do whatever it takes just to make this *end.*

But in his heart, he could never do that. He knows this. A part of him thinks that All For One knows this, too. That look in Ragdoll's eyes, that pleading *don't listen to him* really hit him hard, and his resolve is set more firmly than ever before.

"I won't," Izuku says. He sees Ragdoll breathe a sigh of relief across from him, but ignores it. "I won't do what you want me to do. You said you wanted to break the cycle of blood and death, and I'll have you know, All For One...I want to break it just as badly."

This is the wrong thing to say. All For One straightens up, sits back,

and remains there for a long time.

“I see,” he says, rising to his feet slowly. “So showing you kindness doesn’t sway you, and putting you under immense stress and pain doesn’t sway you, either. You really *are* just as naive as the rest of them, Midoriya Izuku. However…if you really *do* follow in their footsteps…”

He steps towards Ragdoll.

“…Then I think I know what *will* sway you.”

It hits him like a train. “W-Wait,” he gasps; Toga’s hands are on his chains again, pulling him back. “W-Wait, no, what are you—”

“I’m sorry it has to be this way,” All For One says, “truly, I am, but this is your doing, Midoriya Izuku.”

“Don’t,” Izuku bites, and there are tears in his eyes and his voice breaks more than once. He tries getting up, tries standing, but Toga’s arms are hooked beneath his, holding him in place and *no.* “Don’t, please, *please don’t, please—”*

“You had your chance,” All For One says, approaching steadily. Ragdoll doesn’t flinch, but her eyes dart to and fro frantically. “Now you will face the consequences of your actions. Both of you.”

“Don’t!” Izuku is just short of screeching now, and his heart is pounding and his eyes are *burning. “Please don’t—!”*

All For One hesitates for just a moment, hand raised towards Ragdoll. He turns his head, looking at Izuku over his shoulder. “The two of you are heroes, Midoriya Izuku,” he says, and then he turns away from Izuku and focuses on her instead. “You brought this on yourselves.”

Ragdoll meets Izuku’s eyes, and what hits him the hardest is that she’s smiling, even as the tears run down her face.

“It’s not your fault,” she says, and her voice cracks at the end. *“It’s not your fault.”*

Something springs from each of All For One’s fingertips, things like jagged strips of metal, black with red tendrils. Two pierce Ragdoll’s shoulders; two pierce her abdomen; and one pierces the spot just below her throat, near her heart.

The red stripes flash, and Ragdoll convulses and screams.

Something snaps within him, and suddenly Izuku is screaming too. *"Stop it!"* Izuku's voice grates against his throat like a chainsaw, and he can barely hear himself over Ragdoll. *"Stop it! Let her go! Please stop it!"*

He thrashes and kicks and bites but he can't break himself out of Toga's hold. He can't free himself. He can't free Ragdoll. He can't do anything.

By the time it's over, Izuku can't tell who's screaming anymore, himself or Ragdoll. All For One's devices retract into his fingers once again, and Ragdoll crumples to an unmoving heap on the floor. Her eyes are wide open and stare across the room, blank and unseeing and still wet with tears.

Izuku slumps in Toga's grip and squeezes his eyes shut, throat raw from constant screaming and screeching that did absolutely *nothing.* He hears All For One's approaching footsteps again, but can't raise his head.

"Look, my boy."

Izuku chokes on something in his throat—bile, more tears—and does nothing. All For One's fingers touch his chin and guide his head upwards.

"I said to *look."*

Izuku opens his eyes again, and as soon as he does, he wants to throw up. Ragdoll is still unmoving, still limp, eyes wide open, and there's blood beneath her. She's breathing—he can see her back rising and falling—but that's the only good thing about this situation.

"This is what happens when you try to play hero," All For One tells him, releasing his head. Izuku's chin drops back down to his chest, and he squeezes his eyes shut, more tears breaking free. "All the previous holders did it, too, you know. They stood up to me, and look where it got them. I didn't even spare my own flesh and blood."

"It wasn't yours."

Izuku's voice cracks and breaks and he's not even sure anyone can understand him, but All For One stops talking.

“N-None of what you stole,” Izuku chokes, “none of the lives you took, n-none of the people you d-destroyed, t-they didn’t— *their lives weren’t yours to take.* T-They didn’t—t-they *don’t—”* He sees Ragdoll’s eyes again, blank and lifeless, “—They don’t *belong to you.”*

All For One lets out a long suffering sigh and shakes his head. “Oh, my dear boy…” He sinks down onto one knee, leans closer to Izuku’s face, and *smiles.*

“It *all* belongs to me.”

Izuku can’t even muster the willpower to glare.

“Toga, Dabi, please take him back to his cell,” All For One says, rising to his feet leisurely. “You can up the wattage, if you’d like, but make the intervals longer. I’ll take care of the woman.”

Some of Izuku’s awareness returns, and he raises his head. “W-Wait—”

“Got it!” Toga lets go of one of Izuku’s chains and salutes, and Dabi approaches. “Come on, Izuchan! We’re going!”

She and Dabi haul him to his feet, each of them holding one arm, and when it finally *clicks,* Izuku finds strength somewhere he can’t determine and thrashes.

“What are you going to do to her!?” Izuku demands, thrashing and kicking while All For One approaches Ragdoll’s unmoving form and Dabi and Toga drag him away in the other direction. “Don’t touch her! Leave her alone! Let her go! Let her *go!”*

The door slams shut, separating Izuku, Dabi and Toga from All For One and Ragdoll.

Izuku doesn’t stop kicking. He doesn’t stop thrashing and biting and lashing out and screaming. His head is spinning and his throat is raw and his spirit is *stuck tight* to his body again, but none of that matters, none of it.

“She didn’t do anything to you, let her go! Let her go, please!”

He doesn’t remember entering the cell and he doesn’t realize exactly what’s going on until Dabi and Toga are bolting his chains to the floor again. Izuku has no breath left to scream, no strength left to struggle, so he doesn’t.

And then the shock comes.

It's worse than before. It's worse than when he'd first arrived here, when he first angered All For One. It's even worse than the pain of his spirit snapping back into his body.

He doesn't scream. He can't find the strength to. He lets his pain drag him into an unconsciousness that feels so deep and so intense that he isn't sure he'll want to resurface.

Or be able to.

It's appropriate, the thunder. He stares up at a dark sky, cloudy, gray and stormy, and the wind whisks through his hair and clothes.

Standing in the field across from him, in the rolling pastures, is a man. The man, maybe twenty-some years old, stands with his back to him so that he can't make out his face.

He takes in a breath, holds it for a moment, and then approaches. Every step weighs on him more than the last, and the distance seems so uncrossable, like he'll never actually make it there.

But he does. He *does* make it there, and once he's where he needs to be, he stands a mere five feet away from the man. If the man has noticed he's there, he does not acknowledge it, and he takes in a deep breath and tries to will himself to calm down.

"You've strayed so far, Nii-san."

His brother turns toward him, bright green eyes seeming to pierce straight through his soul. "Mirai," he says, turning fully and smiling. It's a warm smile, a smile Mirai knows and trusts, and that makes this all the worse. "I've been hoping you would come here, you know."

Mirai takes in a breath. "I can't say the same."

Nii-san turns his body back towards the horizon, though he glances at Mirai over his shoulder. "Why *did* you come here, Mirai?" he asks at long last. "This isn't your place. You've already learned your lesson, haven't you? Or do I need to refresh your memory?"

It's *almost* a threat, but Mirai doesn't flinch. "Nii-san…"

"Things are better now," Nii-san says, raising his head towards the horizon. Below them stretches a large city, bustling with life. "See?

Not a Quirk-protestant in sight. Isn't this the way things should be, Mirai?"

"No. No, it isn't."

Nii-san turns to him. "No?"

"You've been consumed," Mirai says, looking him in the eyes. "Consumed by your own power and your own ideals. You took the plunge into the fire, Nii-san, and now...you're *burning."*

"Consumed? Is that how you see me?"

Mirai lifts his head. Nii-san looks in the other direction.

"I am the person I wanted to become," Nii-san says, gazing upon the horizon. "I've always dreamed of this, Mirai, always. And now, thanks to this power...I can finally be the person I've always wanted to be. No…"

He turns and faces Mirai again. The smile is different, dangerous.

"...I *am* the person I've always wanted to be."

Mirai's breath gets caught in his throat, and he swallows with difficulty. "I see." He nods slowly, digesting this information. "...Then my brother is truly dead."

Nii-san turns back towards the city, then lets out a long sigh. "I don't want to fight you again, Mirai, you know that. You've already fought me and lost, do you really want to do it again?"

"The people aren't happy," Mirai says, raising a hand to gesture at the city. "They're living out their lives, but they're afraid of you. This power you're so proud of, this power you flaunt around and boast like it's some wonderful thing...you're hurting so many people, and regardless of whether or not I'm strong enough, I have to stop you."

Nii-san sighs again. "So we're back to this old thing," he says, shaking his head. "It's disappointing, really. I was hoping this was just something we could agree to disagree on, but, if you really want to die —"

"I don't want to die," Mirai cuts in, and he shifts his stance and puts his fists up in front of his face. "I don't want to die, but I also don't want to lose hope. People who are living without hope of the future

may as well be dead men walking."

"Bold of you to say so." Nii-san doesn't put up his fists. He doesn't need to. "You will fight me and lose, Mirai, just like before. Only this time, I won't be forcing another Quirk on you. I wouldn't want to risk you somehow surviving it a second time."

Mirai swallows hard. The embers of One For All are within him, but the power is already safely tucked away with its next wielder. He'd made sure of this before coming to face Nii-san.

Mirai looks into his brother's eyes, and he doesn't see the man he's become. He sees the big brother who taught him how to tie his shoes, who helped him cope when their parents died, who guided him through every struggle and every hurt.

Nii-san…

Now, he has to remind himself that he's staring into the eyes of a monster.

…What have you done?

The state Izuku is in is something truly terrifying.

It's always been odd for Nana, being passenger instead of driver, witnessing things playing out from a point of view that isn't hers. It's odd to feel another's feelings, to experience things that aren't hers, things that don't belong to her. It's always been odd for her, just like it's always been odd for the ex-holders.

But now, it's not odd. It's terrifying.

Izuku is *out,* completely, totally *out,* and while she maintains her own consciousness, as do the other past holders, Izuku has none. He has no consciousness, the world around her is black and dark and empty.

But despite that, she feels something deep, something painful, something that *grates* on every fibre of her being and makes her want to scream and kick and tear her hair out.

It's a deep pain, a deep hurt, something aching and it *physically hurts her,* just like it physically hurts the rest of the holders, and she realizes that this is the pain Izuku is feeling now, even unconscious. This is the level of hurt.

And then something odd happens. Faintly—very, very faintly, almost too faint to hear—a voice calls her by name. The voice doesn't belong to any of the other ex-holders. It doesn't belong to her own train of thought.

She's whisked away before she has the chance to figure out what it means, and then suddenly, she's standing in a white void, feet planted on solid ground despite the fact that she can't tell floor from walls, walls from ceiling. She looks down at her hands, and she can see the floor through them. She's still completely transparent.

She lifts her head and looks around. She spins around once, twice, and then—

She sees Izuku.

He's facing her, ten or so feet away in the white void. His form is transparent here, too, just like hers. The scar across his face is more prominent than ever before, and so are the smaller scars scattered across his spirit. The look in his eyes carries a heavy sense of pain and fear, and it strikes Nana somewhere close, somewhere *real.*

Nana runs to him. He doesn't move to meet her, and when her arms encircle his shoulders and pull him into a tight embrace, he doesn't move. She wants to take him away from this, she wants to get him somewhere safe *so badly.* This is Toshi's boy, the boy Toshi loves with his whole heart, and Izuku has become near and dear to her too in the short time that she's known him, and she can't bear to watch him suffer from the sidelines.

Izuku taps her shoulder lightly, and she pulls away and steps back, giving him space. Izuku meets her eyes, and they shine and shimmer with held-back tears.

He mouths something, something she doesn't hear, but the words ring clear in her mind and heart and soul.

Please help me.

He holds his hand out to her, and she takes it.

She's in his prison cell. She lurches forward with a gasp, her fist closing on air, *real air.* She spins around, and Izuku is lying on the floor, chained, unconscious, still.

She crosses the floor towards him and reaches out to touch his face.

Her hand phases right through him, and she withdraws it with a gasp. She doesn't know why she'd been expecting anything else, but—

Something's wrong. Her image isn't only transparent, it's *flickering,* and when she pauses and looks at Izuku's body, she realizes that he's flickering, too. Flickering between what his body is, and what his spirit looks like. She sees his scars between the flickers, some new and some old.

She can't touch him. She can't break him out of his chains. She can't do any of that.

But there *is* one thing she *can* do.

"I'll be back," she says, and in the back of her mind, there are sirens going off. He'd summoned her without meaning to, brought her here while he was still unconscious, while he was still in his own body, because he'd been *that desperate.*

But there's a time limit, a crushing one, and Nana turns and runs, even though she's screaming at herself to do the opposite.

She doesn't know if it'll work, but she tries it. She phases through the door of the cell—her spirit has no substance now—and then through the wall, out into the night.

She's flickering worse now. She doesn't know for how much longer she can maintain this, but she pushes onwards, running. She uses her own Quirk to enhance her speed, her agility, her senses.

She *flies.*

Their operation will be underway in a matter of moments. Toshinori and the others are already stationing themselves at Kamino Ward for the attack. There's still a time before they launch it; they need final confirmation from Naomasa and they're still awaiting to hear back from Kamui Woods and Mt. Lady.

The waiting game is *painful.* It's truly one of the most painful things Toshinori has had to do.

He's alone at the moment, alone and waiting for the others' signals. They'll launch their attack soon, *soon,* and as soon as they do they'll be able to get Izuku out of there, they'll be able to *save him*—

“Toshi!”

Toshinori honest to god *jumps,* and he spins around. There’s nothing there, no one, but that had *definitely* been Nana’s voice.

And if *Nana* is here, then—

“Sensei,” Toshinori says dumbly, looking around. “Where—”

“Izuku summoned me,” Nana’s voice says, and she sounds desperate, more desperate than Toshinori has ever heard her.

“Izuku?” Toshinori repeats. “Where—is he—?”

“Toshi, you have to get him out of there,” Nana’s voice pleads, and she sounds desperate and scared in a way that Toshinori has never heard before, ever. *“You have to get to him, you have to get to him and you have to get him out of there* right now.”

“We’re moving soon,” Toshinori says, and around him, the world *spins.* “As soon as the signal comes, we’re—”

“You don’t understand, you have to do it now,” Nana says, and her voice is firm and cold and icy all at once. It shakes Toshinori down right to the core. *“They have him locked away in one of the rooms in their facility. The second door down the hall, that’s where he is. The villains are leaving him alone for now, this is your chance.”*

Toshinori’s vision is tilting, and he feels suddenly lightheaded. “Nana —”

“Toshinori, you have to get Izuku out of there,” Nana says, and Toshinori feels something icy on his shoulders, something cold and *there* even though the space in front of him remains empty. *“They’re hurting him, Toshi, they’re—they’re* killing *him.”*

Chapter End Notes

> I realized earlier this morning that it's Izuku's birthday today. Happy birthday, soft boi.
>
> (To those who skipped to the end: Izuku was shocked with a higher voltage than usual. Ragdoll had her Quirk stripped away right in front of him, and Izuku was shocked a second time to greater extent. He saw a portion of Mirai's death through an unconscious-dream, but his actual death isn't shown.)

Found/Tonight

Chapter Summary

"Found/Tonight" by Ben Platt and Lin-Manuel Miranda

“We may not yet have reached our glory,
But I will gladly join the fight.
And when our children tell their story,
They’ll tell the story of tonight.”

Chapter Notes

Before we begin, art!!

orangevonsweets

Animatic by ItsByMe

chiangyorange

emmamomonkey

honey-tea21

icanceledart

Thank you all so much!! I hope you enjoy the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“How long do you want to keep going on like this, Mirai?”

Mirai dodges out of the way of a blow; Nii-san’s blast lands right behind him, where he’d been standing moments before. Mirai tumbles, but gets his feet underneath him again right afterwards.

“As long as I have to,” Mirai says simply, putting his fists up in front of his face. “I’m not afraid of you, Nii-san.”

Nii-san smiles at him, arm raised and poised to strike. “But are you afraid to die?”

“If it comes down between dying and letting you go on like this without raising my voice,” Mirai says, shifting into a better fighting stance, “then I think the choice is obvious.”

Nii-san lets out a long sigh and shakes his head. “I don’t want to do this,” he says, “especially not to my own brother, but I will not allow those who rise against me to get away without facing the consequences. You want an endurance match, but I’ll end this quickly.”

He fires off a blast.

“Or…”

Mirai lifts his head and narrows his eyes.

“…Will you?”

“You need to be strong, kid.”

“It isn’t your time yet. You have to keep moving.”

“Keep moving and stay alive. Stay alive, boyo. You’ve got people waiting for you out there.”

“C’mon, dude, not you too. You’ve gotta make it through this.”

“You’re going *to make it through this.”*

“Please. For us.”

“For the people you love.”

“For the people who love you.”

A chorus:

“Stay alive.”

Izuku opens his eyes.

Gran Torino is in the middle of discussing their plan of attack with Edgeshot (specifically when the accursed signal will finally sound) when All Might races towards him, looking more frantic than Gran has ever seen.

“One second,” Gran says, already getting a bad feeling in his gut. Edgeshot nods and heads off, and Gran turns towards All Might further. “Toshinori, what’s—”

“Midoriya,” All Might says, and he sounds out of breath, which shouldn’t be possible considering who he is. “Midoriya, he summoned Nana, she came to me for help—”

There are several things that are *wrong* about that statement without even counting in All Might’s behavior. “He summoned Nana,” Gran says, and the words echo in his head once, then twice. “...So, he’s definitely here, then. In Kamino.”

“She told me where he was,” All Might says, and Gran feels like he’s been taken back in time, when he’d blocked off a teenage Toshinori from the scene of Nana’s death. “She said they have him in the storage room of the bar, the second room down the hall. Gran Torino, we have to—I can’t simply—”

Gran knows this behavior. This reckless desperation. He understands it. But even so—

“No, Toshinori.” He can’t stop All Might physically, but maybe words can. “I know you want to save him. We all do. It’s why we’re here. But if you barrel in there now, we have less of a chance of carrying this out than we would if we follow our plan.”

All Might opens his mouth to object, but Gran shakes his head.

“Please, listen to me. We’re going in soon, real soon, and as soon as we’re in there, you’ll be able to save Midoriya. We’ll get him back, Toshinori, I promise. But we need to wait for the signal.”

All Might doesn’t seem convinced, and of course he isn’t. Everything he’s feeling now, his desperation, his impatience, makes perfect sense. Gran doesn’t and can’t blame him.

But he nods. “On the signal,” All Might says.

Gran nods back at him. “On the signal.”

Getting to Kamino is easy, but actually deciding their next course of action once they’re there is a lot harder.

“We need disguises,” Kirishima says after they’ve been walking for quite some time down the long, bustling streets of Kamino. “The villains know our faces, right? If they’re really around here, going on like we are now would be really stupid.”

“There’s a thrift shop further down the road,” Iida says, raising a hand and pointing. “We’re bound to find something there to make ourselves unrecognizable.”

“If we’re going in secretly anyway,” Bakugou grumbles, “then why the hell do we need disguises?”

“In this part of town at this time of night, it’s unusual to see high school students out and about,” Yaoyorozu informs, picking up the pace and advancing towards the thrift shop Iida pointed to. “If we want to get through undetected, we need disguises.”

“Agreed,” Shouto says quickly when Bakugou opens his mouth. “We don’t really have much of a choice right now. We need to do whatever it takes to rescue Midoriya.”

Bakugou rolls his eyes, but says nothing more.

Once they’re inside the shop, finding disguises isn’t hard. Yaoyorozu and Uraraka have the easiest time of it; they find cheap but flattering dresses, and Uraraka pins her hair back in a bun. Yaoyorozu lets her hair over her shoulders. They look older than they are, Yaoyorozu especially, which is perfect. It’s what they’re going for.

As for the rest of them, it’s a bit trickier. Shouto finds a black wig, since his dual colored hair is a dead giveaway, and Iida too has to buff up his disguise a bit more, considering he’s the younger brother of Ingenium and more easily recognizable. Kirishima’s bright red hair should be a dead giveaway, too, but considering he isn’t well known or particularly favored by the public, he should be fine. Bakugou’s disguise is simple; he ties a red headband around his forehead (Kirishima’s idea) and wears sunglasses. It isn’t ideal, but he isn’t as recognizable, so Shouto doubts it’ll be an issue.

“Alright,” Yaoyorozu says as they exit the thrift shop. She pulls her wallet out of her purse, pretending to be looking at her cards when in reality she’s checking the reading on the GPS. “We should be on the right track now,” she says, raising her head and stuffing her wallet and the device back into her handbag. “Farther down, there’s a more abandoned sector of the city. That’s where the device wants us to go.”

Uraraka nods. “We should hurry,” she says, already turning and starting down the road. Her cheap heels click the sidewalk, and the others are quick to follow her. “We don’t know what the villains are doing to Deku, so it’s—”

“Boof!”

Shouto stiffens. So do the others. In unison, they spin around towards the sound; Howler prances towards them, tongue lolling out of the side of his mouth.

“Howler?” Kirishima says, moving forward and kneeling in front of the dog. Howler licks his face, and Kirishima pushes him back and looks at the others over his shoulder. “Okay, I’m sorry, but *how the heck did he get here.”*

“He must have stowed away on the train, somehow,” Yaoyorozu says, but she doesn’t sound convinced herself, and she cradles her chin in her hand. “This isn’t good…having him with us could blow the entire operation...”

“Not if he’s quiet,” Shouto says, and in his heart, he thinks he knows why Howler is here. Howler has always been more intelligent than other animals Shouto had come in contact with, more alert and in tune to the things around him. Howler came because somehow, he knew they were going after Midoriya. Shouto doesn’t know how he knew, but somehow or another, he did.

“Actually, this might not be a bad thing,” Kirishima says, tapping his chin with a finger. “I don’t know about you guys, but Howler is pretty fierce when he’s protecting somebody, especially Midoriya. He really tore up Shigaraki’s arm back at the mall—”

“And that is wonderful,” Iida says, and he reaches up as though to straighten his glasses before remembering that, as part of his disguise, he isn’t wearing them. “However, we all agreed that we will not be engaging in combat with the villains.”

“Well, we can’t just *leave* Howler here, either,” Kirishima says, turning to him. “Do you think he could sniff Midoriya out, maybe? Is that a thing he could do?”

“I don’t think he’s been trained to do that,” Iida says, kneeling in front of Howler and settling a hand on the dog’s head. “This is...problematic.”

“We have to take him with us,” Uraraka says, turning towards the group. “Kirishima is right, we can’t just leave him here alone, and we don’t have time to drop him off with anyone else.”

“Frickin’ fantastic” Bakugou tosses his head. “Now there’s a *dog.”*

“We have to lay extra low if we’re going to have Howler with us,” Kirishima says. “Shigaraki knows what he looks like, and if he makes the connection…”

“We’ll cross that bridge when we come to it,” Yaoyorozu says, turning back towards the street. “Right now, we need to locate Midoriya. Everything else comes after.”

In silent agreement, the group advances. Yaoyorozu checks the device every now and then, just to make sure they’re on the right track, and occasionally redirects the group in the direction they need to go. Howler stays by Shouto’s side, head facing forward, though he does bump Shouto’s leg lightly every so often.

“Hey, it’s U.A.!”

They’re already on edge, so when a nearby civilian shouts it, Shouto nearly jumps out of his skin. He and the others turn, ready to defend themselves—

Until they realize that the civilian wasn’t speaking of them, but rather what was being displayed on an enormous television screen in the plaza. On-screen shows Aizawa and Nedzu standing before a press conference, bowed lowly, cameras flashing around them.

“We will now be replaying a clip of U.A.’s apology before the press that took place earlier tonight,” says a reporter’s voice through the screen.

“No way,” Kirishima says, eyes wide. “Aizawa hates the media, but…”

His voice trails off, and he and the others tune their ears to listen with the crowd of onlookers.

“What happened at the training camp was entirely the fault of U.A.,” Aizawa says, once the press on-screen had quieted down and the cameras stop flashing. *“Despite that we hold ourselves as an institution for heroes in training, our negligent defenses against the villains left us open to an attack , and I understand your concern and unease. There is absolutely no excuse for what transpired, and I apologize sincerely.”*

“Question, sir.” One of the on-screen reporters raises a hand. *“This marks the fourth time that the students of U.A. have been targeted and attacked, and during these situations, it would seem that the student by the name of Midoriya Izuku is a particularly favored target of the League. What do you have to say, not only to his family, but to the families of the other students who were affected by the villains’ most recent endeavor?”*

Aizawa takes in a long breath. Shouto can feel the tension in the air, and it's almost enough to constrict him.

"Also," the questioner goes on before Aizawa has the chance to respond, *"please, I'm sure we'd all like to know what measures you will be taking to prevent things like this from ever happening again."*

"They're treating them like the villains here," Iida says, which is exactly what Shouto is thinking. "Going this far into the questioning when they already know U.A.'s stance…"

"We've increased our surveillance of the surrounding areas and revamped the school's entire security system," Nedzu answers in place of Aizawa, maintaining a calm, collective demeanor. *"We have already spoken with the parents of the students and promised that these measures will ensure the students' safety."*

"Are they serious?" one of the onlookers says, shaking his head. "What a load of bull. They endanger the lives of these kids and think that a couple flowery words and a 'revamped security system' is gonna put people's minds at east? Unbelievable. *Un-freaking-believable."*

"What're they *saying?"* another one says, staring up at the screen wide-eyed. "Didn't they already revamp the school's security system after that kid was hurt at the USJ incident?"

"Yeah, load of good *that* did," says another, shaking their head. "Sheesh. We'd be better off if they shut the school down."

"The villain attacks certainly are concerning…"

"What is U.A. even *doing?"*

"It hasn't even been a full year since the start of school and there have already been four attacks on the students…"

The atmosphere has plummeted. The din has increased. Howler backs up, head darting back and forth, and Shouto clenches his teeth behind his lips, overwhelmed.

"Midoriya Izuku has proved himself to be a very strong individual," says another reporter. *"He placed first in the U.A. entrance exam and showed first in both starting events of the U.A. sports festival. What if…those attributes made him a target? What if a skilled manipulator twists his mind, and sends him down the path of evil?"*

“Are you kidding me?” It’s Bakugou who speaks and balls his fist like he’s ready to throw down with the television. “What kind of—”

“You’ve made it clear that your goal is to protect these students and their futures,” the reporter goes on, *“but can you provide proof that, as you say…the boy still* has *a future?”*

Bakugou’s teeth are gritted, and so are Shouto’s, but he watches the screen with the others and waits for Aizawa’s counter.

“Say what you will about myself and U.A.,” Aizawa says coldly, *“but I will not have you slandering my student like that. Midoriya Izuku has proven himself time and time again as a true hero, and if the villains have even the slightest thought that they can somehow convert him to their side, then they’re in for a rude surprise.”*

“Damn straight,” Kirishima says, raising a fist. “You tell them, Sensei.”

“That’s hardly evidence,” the reporter says passively. *“You dodged the question, Aizawa Shouta. Does Midoriya, or does he not, have a future?”*

“He does.” Aizawa looks not into the eyes of the reporter, but into the camera. *“He has a bright future ahead of him, and we will stop at nothing to retrieve him from the villains.”*

Uraraka tugs at Shouto’s sleeve. “We should go,” she murmurs. “The press conference might be able to distract the villains, we should keep moving while we still can.”

Shouto has no objections. He nods and turns away with the others, breaking free from the crowd and continuing down the sidewalk. He hears a couple “boo”s and more complaining and jeering from the onlookers, but keeps his head and his mind forward.

Aizawa had said, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that Midoriya has a future. And Shouto knows as well as the rest of them that that “future” doesn’t lie with the villains.

“This way,” Yaoyorozu says quietly, and when they’re sure no one else is looking, they duck into a nearby alleyway and keep onwards. They’re heading further away from the commotion now, into the desolate sector of the city that Yaoyorozu had mentioned earlier.

“I don’t even doubt we’re going the wrong way here,” Kirishima comments quietly, looking up at the walls. They’re covered in graffiti

and cracked, and Shouto doesn't trust them not to crumble at any given moment. "This place is almost *too* abandoned to not be part of the villains' hideout."

"Cliche as hell," Bakugou grumbles. "Of course the villains would put their base in the most out of the way part of the city."

The background noise fades from Shouto's ears until all that's left is the sound of their footsteps and Howler's tingling name tags. They follow the alley down the curves and turns, and when they come out of it, find themselves standing before several towering warehouses, with dark, sometimes blown-out windows and an overgrown porch.

"That one." Yaoyorozu raises a hand and points. "That one there. That's where the device leads."

They move as one, quickly but silently. Shouto steps over a pile of scattered, broken glass; in front of him, Kirishima steps on another pile, but quickly moves to avoid making too much racket. The area is completely silent, and the anticipation and suspense is *killing* Shouto right about now. He's just waiting for a villain to jump out at them from around the corner and strike.

But that doesn't happen, of course. Howler bumps his leg again, and they move on.

"This building is completely abandoned," Uraraka says, raising a hand and touching a crack in the cement wall with her fingertips. Shouto has the urge to tell her to back away, but it's just his paranoia talking at this point.

"Yeah," Bakugou says, his own hands stuffed deep into his pockets. "It's *too* abandoned."

"The porch is overgrown with weeds," Yaoyorozu says, pointing. The patio is cracked and destroyed, and weeds spring free from between the cracks. "They wanted to keep this place as secretive as they could…"

"So we should go in from the back," Shouto says, stepping forward. It's the first time he's spoken in a while. "If the villains really have Midoriya in there, they've gotta have the front door rigged, or at least well-guarded."

"Right, true," Iida says, nodding. "So we'll go in from the back."

They make their way around the building slowly but quickly, and once they get there, they don't find a door, but they do find several small windows, just barely out of reach.

"We'll stand on each other's shoulders," Uraraka says, slipping off her heels immediately. "Yaoyorozu, can you hold me?"

Yaoyorozu nods, already crouching with little heed to how her dress drags the ground. "Come on."

"You can get on my shoulders, Todoroki," Kirishima says, crouching likewise, and Shouto doesn't protest.

"Bakugou," Iida says, turning towards him.

It takes a matter of moments before Yaoyorozu, Iida and Kirishima have hoisted Uraraka, Bakugou, and Shouto respectively onto their shoulders. Shouto cups his hands around his eyes and looks into the window, as does Uraraka next to him, but he can't see a thing through the darkness.

"It's pitch black in there," Uraraka says, pulling away and biting her lip. "I can't see anyth—"

Bakugou thrusts what looks like a pair of binoculars at her, and Uraraka fumbles with them a moment before securing them in her hands. She turns to him and blinks quizzically, and Bakugou looks the other way.

"My dad had it from a long time ago," Bakugou mutters under his breath. "A night vision camera. Thought it'd come in handy, so I brought it."

Uraraka turns to look at Shouto for a moment, and he shrugs and shakes his head. Uraraka brings the camera towards her eyes and presses the lens against the glass, peering in.

"How is it?" Iida asks from below. "Do you three see anything ye—"

Uraraka reels back unexpectedly with a sharp cry, almost dropping the camera. Yaoyorozu stumbles back, but shifts her feet in time to catch her balance.

"What is it?" Shouto interrogates. Dread has begun to fill his chest, and he stares into Uraraka's wide, horrified eyes. "What's there? What did you see?"

She cups one hand over her mouth and uses the other to pass the camera over. Shouto takes it and, before he can think himself out of it, looks into the window through the lens.

He sees at least a dozen tanks first, each one maybe four or five times the size of a bathtub. They're each filled with some kind of a liquid (Shouto doesn't want to know what it is), and just barely peeking out of the top of each are what look like—

Shouto swears.

"Gimme those." Bakugou reaches across Uraraka and snatches the camera back, bringing it towards his face to gaze into the warehouse. After a moment or two of looking, "What in the *hell."*

"What is it?" Kirishima says from down below. "Guys we're dying down here, *what do you see?"*

"Nomus," Shouto answers past the bile in his throat. "Tons of— *literal dozens* of them. They're in these tanks, like they're being— *formed,* I don't know."

Below them, Howler makes a small, fragile noise of distress. Shouto can't blame him. Not when he's feeling the same way.

"That's *not it,"* Bakugou snaps, though he doesn't lower the camera. *"Why the hell is there a person in there?"*

Shouto's heart *leaps* into his throat, and so does his stomach. "What?" He reaches for the camera again, and surprisingly, Bakugou lets him take it. Shouto peers back through the window, and this time, he looks past the tubs of Nomus, in search of something else.

"The corner," Bakugou says across from him. "The corner, by the real big tank. There's a table."

Shouto shifts the camera, and sure enough, there *is* a person. Shouto can't make out any defining features through the distance and the green hue of the night vision camera, but there's a woman laying on the table, wearing a hospital gown. Her hair hangs around her, nearly dragging the ground.

Shouto feels like he's going to be sick for the utmost time this evening, but he again forces the bile back. "She's unconscious," he says, lowering the camera. "Do you think she's a villain?"

“Hell no,” Bakugou says. Uraraka tugs the camera from Shouto’s hands and looks back into the window. “Why would they keep one of their own unconscious on a freaking *table?* She’s gotta be on our side, she’s gotta be—”

“You guys.”

Uraraka’s face is pale again, and her hands shake as she lowers the camera.

“I think that’s Ragdoll.”

Shouto doesn’t have the chance to register the information, much less respond to it. Howler makes a shrieky, desperate kind of bark, which pushes him and the others even further on edge.

And then the ground shakes.

“Get down!” Iida hollers, and that’s about all the time anyone has to say anything before a shockwave blasts them all back.

Toga unlocks the door to the cell with a spring in her step, twirling the keyring around one finger. She’s smiling so widely that it actually hurts her face, but there’s a sparkle in her eyes and a short, bubbly giggle in her throat.

“Izuchan!” she sings, skipping across the room and stopping just before him. He’s laying on his side, his hair covering his eyes, and he’s completely limp and motionless.

Unconscious.

Toga beams brighter and swings her arms back and forth with another bout of high-pitched laugher.

“You’re so much cuter when you’re broken on the ground, Izuchan!” she chirps cheerfully, then cranes her neck to peer at his wrist, where the mechanism is. The timer is ticking down steadily from three and a half minutes; the spaces in between shocks are longer now, considering she’d upped the wattage a considerable amount on All For One’s orders. She got here just in time.

“Only three and a half minutes!” Toga says, letting her arms sway at her side for a moment. Her keyring jingles, and she likes the sound, so she does it again. “You know what, Izuchan, I’m going to go ahead

and unlock your chains. Boss Man wants me to bring you over to the warehouse. Said he has a surprise for you!"

She kneels by the ground and inserts the first key into the lock securing the end of Izuku's chain to the metal ring on the floor. She undoes the first lock, and it hits the wooden floor with a small thump. Izuku doesn't twitch or stir whatsoever, remaining completely dead to the world.

Toga beams. "It makes me sad that we have to keep you chained," she laments, shaking her head and moving towards the other lock, "but we can't have you escaping. You keep making Boss Man angry, you know." She inserts the second key into the lock. "He's going to get reeeeeally mad pretty soon if you don't stop."

The lock hits the ground.

Izuku's eyes snap open, and he tackles her.

Three minutes.

I have three minutes.

Toga lets out a shout that sounds half of surprise and half of pain. The back of her head smacks the ground, and there's a knife in her hand a second later. Izuku's fingers coil around her wrist and slam the back of her hand against the floorboards. The knife flies from her hand, maybe five feet away. She sinks her teeth into Izuku's forearm; Izuku releases her and springs back, his chains rattling with the movement.

Toga scrambles to her feet and whips a second knife out from nowhere. She lunges, and Izuku dives to the side. He crashes into the empty storage shelf, gets an idea, and leaps to his feet again. He kicks the shelf over; it hits Toga's shoulder as she dodges out of the way, and it's enough to buy Izuku the couple seconds he needs to find his bearings and get away from her.

"Come on, Izuchan!"

She doesn't seem angry. She's still smiling, but that's scarier.

"Just stop moving so much," Toga says, springing at him with her knife. "I don't want to kill you, honest! I just wanna make you bleed a little."

Izuku dodges her attack again, but his movements are beyond sloppy

and he's absolutely sure he's just moving on adrenaline now and nothing more. He doesn't know how long it's been or what the timer looks like. All he knows is that time is limited, the mechanism is going to shock him soon, and Toga has the keyring he needs to get it off of him.

She springs at him, and Izuku ducks. His fingers touch the ground, and he swings his leg. His shin connects with Toga's ankle, and she trips and loses her balance. Izuku brings the top of his head under her chin, and she tumbles back.

Less than a minute now.

Izuku gets as close to her face as he dares and opens his eyes at near point-blank, staring into hers. She flinches back from their unnatural light, and it gives Izuku the time he needs to get behind her and swing his chains so they wrap tight around her chest. He grabs the end of the left chain with his right hand, and the end of the right chain with his left hand, criss-crossing them and squeezing as tight as he can, then tighter.

Toga makes a strangled sound, clawing at the chains with one hand and swinging her other hand—her knife hand—to try and stab at Izuku's knees. She can't see where she's aiming while Izuku *can,* so he's able to dodge, but her struggling is exhausting and she's a lot stronger than she looks.

Please.

He shuts his eyes and squeezes the chains around her tighter, bracing himself.

Please, please, please—!

The shock comes, and he never thought he'd actually be relieved to feel the sensation. He's ready for it. He's used to it. He's felt it several times over and he knows what to expect.

Toga isn't like that. She *screams,* the electricity traveling through Izuku's chains wrapped around her chest, and Izuku grits his teeth and rides it out.

Wait for it.

The sensation cuts, and Izuku ignores his spinning head and the pain sparking through his body. He swings Toga towards the wall by his

chains and smacks the back of her skull into it. The *crack* makes Izuku want to throw up. She goes limp, and Izuku lets go of the chains so she doesn't drag him down with her when she crumples to the ground in an unmoving heap.

Izuku stands there for a second, gasping, still riding out the adrenaline and the remaining sting of pain from the shock. There are chainlink-shaped scorch marks on Toga's sweater. Her fingers are still curled loosely around the hilt of her knife. She isn't bleeding, but Izuku has no doubt she'll come out of this with one hell of a concussion.

"Kid? Kid, are you okay?"

Izuku doesn't answer. He grabs the keyring off the ground and tries unlocking his shackles. His hands are shaking so badly that it actually takes him a little while before he can properly insert the key, but he manages it. The first shackle—the one with the shocking mechanism, counting down steadily from thirty—hits the floor by Toga's unmoving body. Izuku grasps his wrist, fingers brushing over bright red scorch marks that he *knows* will scar.

"Kiddo? Hey, Izuku."

Izuku moves to the second shackle, unlocking it and letting it fall to the floor likewise. Even after they're gone, his hands still tremble, and sweat rolls down his face and neck.

"Buddy? Dude, say something—"

Izuku makes a mad dash for the door, heart pounding in his throat and temples. He has to run around Toga's body to make it there. She didn't lock the door behind her upon entrance, so at least he doesn't have to worry about trying to jam another key into another lock. He stuffs the keys into his pocket *(just in case,* and those three words make his stomach *twist)* and, when he's sure the coast is clear, he starts down the hallway.

"Yo, boyo."

He doesn't head towards the bar. Rather, he goes the opposite direction down the winding hallway. Maybe there's some kind of a back door; either way, he can't get out from the front, not when he knows all the villains (and possibly All For One) are there. Taking out Toga had already been mostly because of luck and desperation. He doesn't think he could beat another villain in a fight if he tried. When he thinks about it, he takes off his bell and stuffs that in his pocket,

too. It'd be unfortunate if he was found out thanks to it.

"Buddy, please."

"I can't talk," Izuku gasps out, stumbling along. His head is spinning and everything aches something horrible, but at the same time, he feels...weird. Detached, even though he's *pretty sure* he's still in his body. And he still feels pain, which automatically means he hasn't dissociated, but…

"Please, I can't talk, I just…" Izuku has to stop, and he settles his hand against the wall for a moment to catch his breath. "I can't talk right now. I can't. Right now I just, I need to…"

"Got it. Sorry, kid."

"We're just worried."

"I know," Izuku says, pressing the heels of his hands into his eyes. "I know, *I know,* I just, I need—I need to figure things out. I need to—"

There're a lot of things he needs to do. He needs to get out of here. He needs to find out why he's still here and not in the spirit realm. He remembers, vaguely, a white nothingness, and he remembers finding Nana there, and he remembers bringing her, summoning her, but he'd been completely unconscious and still *very much so in his body* so he doesn't know how that was even a thing he could *do*—

"Right now I need to keep moving," Izuku rushes out in a single, short breath. "If I stop and actually *think* about things right now I'm not going to be able to start again. There's something—there's something I need to do."

The ex-holders have been talking to him for some time now, but Mirai still hasn't said a single thing. Izuku thinks about the vision he had, his sight of Mirai's death, and…

We can't find peace the way we are, Dai had said what felt so long ago, when Izuku summoned him for the second time following the Hero Killer incident. *I thought I'd be able to pass on, thought I'd be able to move forward in peace, but I haven't. None of us have, not the people before me, and not the people after me. All of us, we're broken spirits, Midoriya.*

Izuku hadn't realized it before. Or, at the very least, it hadn't *hit him* as hard before. The ex-holders are broken spirits thanks to All For

One, unable to rest in peace or fully pass on. And Izuku thinks about Todoroki, about his flickering form and his scarred spirit. He thinks about his own scars.

"Moving," Izuku reminds himself finally, pushing himself on. He knows it'll catch up with him later, everything he's been through and all he's endured, but for now he can push past it. If just for a little while longer. "I've gotta— *we've* gotta keep moving."

And he does. He finds his bearing somehow amidst everything else and, when he's absolutely sure he isn't being followed, *runs.*

"Move!"

The signal comes and goes, and the heroes burst right through the wall with All Might leading the charge.

It's a bar full of villains, who all turn towards the sound of the wall bursting to bits and the heroes pouring in. All Might recognizes all of them; some of them are murderers, others wanted for more petty crimes, and then there's Shigaraki and Kurogiri, who no one knows much about.

The second they're inside, the heroes move. The villains don't have a chance to find their bearings before they're restrained or attacked by one of the invading heroes. Nana's words ring through All Might's head again as though she were right next to him still speaking, and something fills his chest, something he's felt before but is much more intense now in the face of these villains.

In the face of these villains who harmed Izuku.

Nana's words ring true in his head, and without even thinking about it, he grabs the nearest villain to him—Dabi—and slams him against the wall by his throat.

"Midoriya," All Might says through his teeth, *really* resisting the urge to cut off Dabi's airway. "Where is he? What have you done with him?"

"You really care about him that much, All Might?" Dabi asks, blinking wide eyes at him. He cocks his head as best he can with All Might's fingers still coiled around his throat. "You should have gotten here sooner, then, if he really meant that much to you."

All Might doesn't know why, but he feels like *he's* the one with a cut off airway and fingers wrapped around his throat. He looks Dabi in the eyes, unwavering. *"What did you do to Midoriya?"*

Dabi shakes his head, disconcerted. "The boss *broke* your precious student," he answers, and All Might's ears fill with noise. "I don't know why he did it. Maybe he was trying to make a point. Maybe he was trying to prove something. But the student you know is *gone."*

Something in All Might's chest churns, twists, then snaps. "You're lying."

Dabi looks him in the eyes. "Am I?"

"Toshinori!"

It's only through Gran Torino's voice that All Might is brought back to reality. Despite the burning ache in his chest and the sting in his eyes, All Might takes a look at this situation, at Dabi.

And he notices that there's some sort of black goop forming and spreading from Dabi's legs up his chest.

The other villains are in a similar predicament, and judging by their shouts and exclamations of shock, they hadn't been expecting it, either. All Might tries to secure his grip on Dabi, but the black goop makes it incredibly hard, as does his blurry vision.

Dabi doesn't break eye contact with him, even when the goop reaches his neck and spreads even further, consuming him.

"If he meant so much to you," Dabi says, as the black moves up his face, "then why weren't you here when he needed you the most?"

All Might can't stop him, and Dabi and the other villains disappear with the black nothingness.

"Forget about them!" Gran Torino's voice shouts, as the heroes stand dumbfounded and empty handed. "Toshinori, you said you knew where they were holding Midoriya!"

All Might snaps back to reality for the second time, filled with a new sense of purpose. He nods, and with a single punch, blows down the door leading further into the bar. When he gives the all-clear, he and the heroes advance.

The roof of the warehouse is blown clear off by Mt. Lady's single kick. Ochako and the others managed to somehow not be in the direct line of falling chunks of building, and now they're crouched, watching the heroes file into the warehouse while Mt. Lady picks off the Nomus, one by one, yanking them out of their tanks and piling them on the ground nearby.

"The heroes got here," Kirishima says, wide-eyed.

"Can't say I'm that surprised," Yaoyorozu comments softly, and she sinks her teeth into her bottom lip. "With a U.A. student in danger, it only makes sense that they'd strike hard and true as soon as they could. And U.A. doesn't pull punches."

Ochako swallows hard. "So, d-do...do you think they already have Deku?" she asks, turning towards the others. Even as she says it, though, it seems unlikely. "I mean, do you think he's safe now?"

Iida is already shaking his head. "Unlikely," he says. "He wasn't in the warehouse, correct?"

Todoroki shakes his head. "He wasn't. Which means he has to be somewhere else."

The tension is rising, Ochako can feel it in the air, in her friends, in herself. The heroes are in the warehouse, they'll get Ragdoll to safety so she doesn't have to worry about her anymore, but what about Deku? If he's not in the warehouse, if he's not where Yaoyorozu's device led, then *where is he?*

And then Howler's head snaps up and turns in the opposite direction. Ochako wouldn't think much of it if it were any other day with any other dog, but this is Howler. She's seen Howler distressed before a number of times, more times than she wants or wishes to recount, but this time seems different than the other times.

"Howler? What's the matter?" Ochako asks, reaching towards him. Howler doesn't respond to her movement or her gentle touch, which is also startling. His head is turned, and his eyes are focused on the direction opposite of the warehouse. "Howler, what—"

Howler *books it,* and Ochako can't even manage to snag a handful of fur before he's out of reach.

"Howler, no!"

Ochako springs to her feet. So do the others beside her.

“Crap!” Kirishima starts forward. “I knew this was a bad idea, c’mon, we have to grab him before he—!”

“Wait.” Iida holds an arm out to Kirishima, and he stops. “Look.”

Up ahead, Howler turns back towards them. He doesn’t retrace his steps, merely stares. Waits.

It clicks.

“…He wants us to follow him,” Ochako realizes, and her heart gives a leap because *maybe he knows where Deku is.* “Iida, he—”

“Go,” Yaoyorozu says; all eyes are on her in an instant, but she remains stern. “Iida, Ochako, follow Howler. We’ll stay here.”

“What?” Kirishima rounds on her with wide, betrayed eyes. “Why do —”

“We don’t know where Howler is going,” Yaoyorozu cuts in, “and in this situation, the smaller the group, the better. The three of them have a better chance at sneaking around than the seven of us.”

Todoroki opens his mouth as though to object, but doesn’t. Rather, he turns to Iida and Ochako, and while his gaze is as steadfast as ever, Ochako sees something in his eyes, something desperate.

“If you find Midoriya,” Todoroki says heavily, “please—”

“We’ll bring him home,” Iida cuts in, nodding firmly as though to assure himself. “We’ll do whatever it takes to bring Midoriya back safely.”

Todoroki is satisfied with this, and he turns back to the group. Ochako and Iida turn the opposite way and take off after Howler, and as soon as he realizes he’s being followed, Howler bolts again. Ochako is glad she ditched her heels beforehand, or running would be a lot harder.

I FEEL HIM.

HE’S HERE.

MY BOY IS HERE.

HE'S HURTING BUT I KNOW WHERE HE IS, I CAN FEEL HIM. HE'S HERE. HE'S CLOSE. I CAN GET TO HIM. I CAN PROTECT HIM AGAIN. HE'S SAD BUT I CAN FIX IT NOW, I CAN FIX IT.

HE'S HERE AND NOW I CAN SAVE HIM. I CAN SAVE HIM. I CAN SAVE HIM.

I CAN REACH HIM.

Izuku feels like he's going to be sick. The adrenaline is getting to his head now, and it's leaving him with a bone-deep exhaustion that he doesn't even know how to properly put into words. Every one step is harder than the last, but he runs and keeps running, because one thing he's running *out of* is *time.* He doesn't know how long it'll take the villains to realize he's gone. He doesn't know if Toga will regain consciousness. He doesn't know if All For One can use Ragdoll's Quirk now to locate him *(Ragdoll,* he has to find her, he has to get her out of here, he promised).

There's so much he has to do and he doesn't have time to think about himself at all right now, so he runs. He runs, and he doesn't stop.

He hears something. A crash of sorts, echoing from the hallway behind him. The noise itself is enough to make him jump even if he hadn't already been on edge, and he turns his head to look over his shoulder.

He doesn't see anything, but he's positive he heard a crash of sorts. Or maybe he's finally going crazy. Maybe he's finally lost his mind—

He slams into someone.

Izuku flies backwards with a strangled cry, and immediately his thoughts are racing and he's wondering how he's going to fight them off, how he's going to fight the villains and keep running, how he's going to make it out of here alive—

"Deku!"

"Midoriya!"

Izuku barely has a chance to recognize the voice before he's slammed into by a couple dozen pounds of fluffy border collie. He's knocked to the ground this time, unable to remain standing, but that's the least of his thoughts now.

It's Howler. Howler is licking his face, practically climbing on top of him, and Izuku looks numbly upwards. Iida and Uraraka stare back at him, wide-eyed.

It hits him all of a sudden. "Y-You guys," he stammers, and his eyes burn with tears he knows he isn't going to be able to hold back. "I—I'm—"

They move towards him, and he reaches for them. Uraraka's knees slam the ground and her arms go around his shoulders, and a second later, Iida's arms encircle the both of them. Izuku wraps his arms around Uraraka's waist tightly and buries his face against her shoulder. He feels vaguely like he's being strangled.

"You shouldn't be here," Izuku chokes out, shaking his head feverishly. "T-The villains, they'll—they're going to find you, they're going to—t-they're going to—"

"They won't," Iida says, close to his ear. Izuku has never been happier to hear his voice. "They won't, and if they do, we'll take care of them. We will."

Uraraka's shoulders are shaking, but she doesn't let up or loosen her hold on him. "You're okay," she's murmuring, voice choked with tears. "D-Deku, I'm—I'm so glad—"

Her voice trails off, and when she squeezes him tighter, Izuku returns the gesture.

"W-What are you doing here?" he asks, if just to distract himself long enough to get his tears under control.

"The heroes launched their rescue mission, and we launched our own likewise," Iida answers shortly. He doesn't loosen his hold on the two of them. "We came to get you out of here, Midoriya."

Izuku doesn't know why, but the words spark something. A memory. "W-Wait, Ragdoll." Izuku pushes away, and his breath comes in faster while his vision begins to blur. "She was here too, she's hurt, we have to find her and get her out of here—"

"The heroes already found Ragdoll," Uraraka says immediately, reaching out and settling her hands on Izuku's shoulders again. "They have her, Deku, she's safe. She's safe, I promise."

Izuku's panic deflates, and he slumps back into Uraraka's and Iida's

arms. Ragdoll is safe. She's okay. The heroes have her. She's alright.

"The heroes are taking out the villains' facility," Iida says. "We should start moving. If we can make our escape now without the villains noticing…"

The rest goes unsaid. The embrace ends before before Izuku is ready to let go, but he knows there'll be time for it later. When this is all over, once it's finally *done,* he'll hold tight to his friends and not let go.

But that's later.

For now—

Something bursts right by his chest. It's enough to make him yelp and spring backwards, and it's enough to startle Iida and Uraraka, too. Howler must've sensed Izuku's distress, because he's yapping and rubbing up against Izuku's leg.

The *something* is black, and it's growing, spreading across Izuku's body. Izuku doesn't know why, but the sensation reminds him of how he'd felt inches away from Kurogiri's warp gate, back at the mall where he'd *almost* lost himself.

He's being warped.

Iida and Uraraka realize this a second later, and they reach towards them. Izuku swings out both arms to keep them back.

"Don't, I'll be fine!" Izuku says, but the crack in his voice belies his confidence. "I'll be fine, I promise, just get out of here, *please!"*

"Midoriya—!"

"Get out of here!"

The black whatever-it-is hits his face, and he chokes and falls into darkness.

Midoriya was here. He was *right here,* Tenya was *holding him,* and now he's just as gone as he'd been when the villains first took him away.

Tenya wants to scream, but doesn't. Howler is going absolutely crazy again, sniffing and barking desperately at the spot Midoriya had disappeared from, and Uraraka has raced forward and is looking

around, although they all know that Midoriya is gone.

But there's something in the back of Tenya's mind, something that says this time is different than before.

"He's still in the area," Tenya realizes, and Uraraka swings around to look at him. Howler halts his search and does the same. "That wasn't the warp gate," Tenya goes on, stepping toward her. "If the villains are still here, then it doesn't make sense for them to whisk Midoriya off. That was a different kind of gate. Midoriya has to still be here somewhere."

Uraraka's eyes widen. "Which means there's still a chance."

It's a far less likely chance now that the heroes and the villains are officially at war with each other here, but the chance is still there. They might not be able to be as subtle about it as they'd originally planned, but Tenya nods regardless. They'd set out to rescue Midoriya, one way or another, and that's exactly what they're going to do.

"Let's get back to the others," Tenya says, spinning on his heel. "We'll find Midoriya and come up with a strategy then."

"Iida." Uraraka snags the back of his shirt, and Tenya looks at her over his shoulder. Her eyes are wide and full of fear. "Deku, you saw —his *hair—"*

"I know." Tenya hadn't thought about it before, but it's something in the back of his mind. Something that's been there since he first laid eyes on Midoriya. "I know, *I know."*

"We have to get him out of here," Uraraka says desperately, and there are tears in her eyes and her voice trembles. "Iida, *we have to get him out of here."*

"We're going to," Tenya swears, and he means it from the very bottom of his heart. "We're going to get him out of here. He's going to be okay. *Everything's* going to be okay."

He takes off, and Uraraka and Howler follow him closely.

Tenya hadn't been there before, hadn't been there when Midoriya was taken from them, but he'd made a promise after the Hero Killer incident, and he hasn't forgotten that promise. It's one of the things he knows he'll *never* forget.

Hold on, Midoriya.

Hold on.

The room is empty.

There are chains strewn about the floor, a broken shelf by the wall, two knives on the floor, and several rings bolted into the ground. All Might, the first hero in the room, takes one look at it before turning back towards the others.

Izuku *isn't here.*

He doesn't know how he feels about that. It definitely looked like there was some kind of a fight in here. *Something* went down, and All Might can only imagine what that *something* was. Did Izuku try breaking free? Did he steal a key from one of the villains to free himself? And, most importantly, did he *succeed?*

"He's here," Gran Torino says, and his words are the only reason All Might is able to hold his sanity together and not tear up the place from the inside out. "He's here, Toshinori, we know he's here. With the Warp Gate out of commission, they can't get very far. We'll find him."

"I know," All Might says, and the burning *thing* in his chest hasn't died yet. He's not sure it ever will. "We'll find him."

"Move it out!" one of the heroes shouts, twirling his hand above his head, and All Might follows the others out of the small storage-room-turned-prison and back down the hall. Running.

Kirishima's eyes are wide, and he raises a hand and motions at the others."Hey guys, *you might wanna come take a look at this. Right now."*

Shouto peers around the corner of a piece of totalled building they're hiding behind, and Yaoyorozu and Bakugou do the same. Kirishima is pointing to an empty space in a clearing a little ways away—or, what *had* been an empty space. Now, there's a swirling something in the air that looks like it's made of black goop, spreading and growing rapidly.

Then there's a second bout of it near the first one, and it too grows in size. Then there's a third. Then a fourth, and so on.

"What the hell is going on," Bakugou says, which is *exactly* what

everyone else is thinking, but they don't have to wonder for long. From the bouts of black *whatever it is* comes the villains, choking and gasping for breath. The knife girl that'd attacked Uraraka is there, tumbling out of the goop, but she hits the ground in a crumpled heap, unmoving and unconscious.

"Damn, what happened to her?" Dabi asks, stepping towards her.

"You don't think she let the boy escape, do you?" asks the marble-villain, the one that'd taken Midoriya away from them in the first place. Shouto wants to attack now, but doesn't; giving their position away for something so trivial would be very stupid. "It would put *quite* a damper on the show if our main act suddenly decided to leave the stage."

Dabi rolls his eyes. "She must have let him go," he says, turning towards the marble villain. "She underestimates him too much, thinks he's *adorable.* He probably took advantage of her."

"Wait," Kirishima says, blinking, "so...Midoriya *escaped?"*

"It sounds like it," Yaoyorozu says quietly, "but what exactly does that *mean—"*

Another splotch of black nothingness appears, and out from it falls Midoriya.

He hits the ground with a thump, and when he remains unmoving, something in Shouto's chest leaps and spikes. Midoriya is here. He's here. He's right there, if they try maybe they can—

"Don't."

Yaoyorozu snags the back of Shouto's shirt to stop him, and it's only now Shouto realizes he'd been moving forward. "We can't advance, not now," she says, shaking her head. "We can't, Todoroki."

Shouto's tongue feels too thick for his mouth. "He's *right there—"*

"I know, he is," Yaoyorozu says, nodding, "I know he is, but if we blow it now, there's a chance we'll never get him back. We can't be reckless here, not with so much on the line. We have to come up with a plan."

Shouto *hates* it, but he steps back and shakes Yaoyorozu's hand off him, resigned. "Alright. So what do you want to do?"

“I think he’s unconscious,” Kirishima says, wide-eyed. He sits back and chews on his upper lip for a moment. *“Crap,* this is really bad...and the villains are still there, too. We don’t have an opening.”

“He’s not unconscious.”

All eyes turn to Bakugou, but he looks the other way.

“He’s faking it,” Bakugou says, raising a hand and pointing. “He’s faking it so the villains drop their guard.”

“How do you know?” Yaoyorozu asks quietly, following his finger. Midoriya is unmoving on the ground, motionless while the villains advance, and it’s only now that Shouto notices his *hair*—

“I grew up with the idiot,” Bakugou says, head facing forward. “I know how he thinks. He’s gonna make them believe they’ve got this in the bag, and then he’s gonna tear them apart.”

It’s weird, to hear Bakugou speak this way of Midoriya, but Shouto doesn’t comment. “So,” he says, turning to the others, “what do we do?”

“Hey!”

The voice is hissed as loudly as possible without being too loud, and Shouto and the others turn. Uraraka and Iida sprint towards them with Howler hot on their heels, and they move quickly but quietly, ducking behind chunks of building as they go to keep their movements concealed.

“We followed Howler,” Iida says once they’ve caught up with the group. “He showed us into a building, we found—” He stops, eyes falling on Midoriya’s unmoving form. Uraraka murmurs Midoriya’s name quietly, and Iida’s eyes are wide. “Is he—”

“Bakugou believes he’s faking it,” Yaoyorozu informs, turning to him. “He says Midoriya is only pretending to be unconscious so the villains are off guard. He’s waiting for his chance.”

Iida looks at Bakugou for a long moment, and when Bakugou doesn’t return the gesture, he turns to face Yaoyorozu again. “So, if we want to save him…”

“We need a strategy,” Kirishima says, glancing back at the battlefield. The villains are conversing, but Shouto can’t make out their

conversation anymore. “And we need one soon.”

A silence befalls them as they wrack their brains, searching for the answer. Shouto runs one scenario after the other through his head, but he can’t come up with anything he thinks would work. If Midoriya really is *faking* it, like Bakugou said, then he’ll strike soon. When he *does* strike, Shouto and the others need to be there, ready to get him out of harm’s way.

But *how?*

“…I think I have something.” It’s Uraraka who speaks, and all heads turn towards her. She bites her lip, but her eyes are determined. “If Deku really is just pretending to be unconscious like Bakugou says he is, then…then I think I have an idea.”

“We’re all ears,” Iida says at once. “What is it?”

“Follow me,” Uraraka says, spinning on her heel. “We’ve got one shot at this, we need to go in from where they’d least expect it.”

She moves, keeping low to the ground, and the others make haste to follow her.

Izuku’s vision keeps flickering between white and black.

He has his eyes closed—they’ve been closed ever since the black goop swallowed him whole—but his vision is *flickering* now, between the backs of his eyelids and the white landscape he’s visited more times than he wants to count. Now that he has a chance to think about it, he has an inkling as to what that landscape *is,* and he doesn’t like it.

Instead of focusing on *that,* he focuses on the now. There are villains around him, talking in quiet tones; none of them sound particularly worried about him or anything else, which is good. He can take them by surprise so long as they don’t suspect anything.

“He’s either unconscious or he found some way to leave his body without us knowing,” Dabi is saying. Izuku doesn’t dare open his eyes for fear of being found out. “If he’s around here somewhere as a spirit, he’ll have to come back eventually, so I wouldn’t worry too much about it.”

“What are we doing now, then?” Mr. Compress inquires. “I’m all for ‘the show must go on’ and all of that jazz, but I don’t see how the

show can continue now that the theatre has been overrun by scoundrels."

"Do you *have* to use a theatre metaphor for everything? Seriously?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"But Kurogiri's unconscious, too," says another villain, one Izuku doesn't recognize. "How're we gonna get out of here if our warp gate is out of commission?"

"Don't worry."

It's nearly impossible to keep from flinching. Izuku doesn't open his eyes, but he can feel All For One's presence descending on the area, can feel the power rolling off him in waves. He squeezes his eyes shut tighter and just hopes no one notices.

"I have a way," All For One says, and Izuku can hear the smile in his voice. "I assure you, this endeavor will not be in vain."

Across the area, Mt. Lady, Kamui Woods, and the rest of the warehouse team raise their heads. Tiger, cradling a limp, unconscious Ragdoll, feels a chill go down his spine.

"What's that?" Kamui says, looking around.

"I don't know," Mt. Lady replies, shaking her head feverishly, "but I feel like someone just stepped on my grave."

It hits All Might like a train, this familiar, crushing sensation. He's felt it before, six years ago. He thought he'd never have to feel it again, *hoped* he'd never have to feel it again, but…

He meets eyes with Gran Torino, and in that short moment of silence, they know what this means.

"Holy crap, do you feel that?" Kirishima gasps, wide-eyed, hands clutching at his chest. "I feel...crap, I feel *wrong,* what the hell."

The others feel it, too. A crushing weight of power, and overwhelming force, something to be feared, something terrible.

They don't know what it is, but their path doesn't change. "We have

to keep moving," Iida says, bringing everyone's attention back to the task at hand. "We have one shot at this, we can't throw it away."

In silent agreement, they press on.

"Forceful Quirk activation," All For One's voice says; Izuku hears something snap, and when he dares crack his eyes open, he sees those sharp, black *things* with red tendrils spread from All For One's fingers and stab Kurogiri in multiple places. "This should be enough to get you away from here long enough to regroup."

"What about you?" Shigaraki asks, and he sounds younger and more desperate than ever before. "Sensei?"

"I'll be absolutely fine," All For One answers, turning to him with an almost parental kind of smile. "What matters most is that you and the others safely vacate the area. I will follow shortly."

They're leaving, Izuku realizes jarringly; Kurogiri's limp body convulses, and the portals open around them, swirling abysses of black and purple nothing. Twice scoops up Toga and hops through one; Mr. Compress takes a bow and hops through another; then a few others Izuku only ever saw in passing.

They're escaping.

"Sensei—"

"Go, Shigaraki Tomura," All For One says, raising a hand to Shigaraki and pointing at the nearest gate. "Go. I will join you again soon."

Shigaraki doesn't like it, but he doesn't argue. He turns and steps towards the gate, and it sparks something in Izuku's chest. It sparks a desperate, pleading *they're getting away, you can't let them get away, you have to stop them,* and he almost, *almost* blows cover then and there.

But—

"Is it really worth your own life, Midoriya?"

He made a promise to Kirishima that he wouldn't repeat what happened at the mall. He promised—he *promised,* and even though he grits his teeth and squeezes his eyes shut, he will not break that promise.

He hears the gates close, and when he cracks an eye open, only one

remains. All For One raises his head toward the remaining villain aside from Kurogiri, then moves his arm toward the remaining warp gate.

“Dabi, I’ll leave you in charge of the boy. Take him through the portal.”

“Sure.”

Izuku shuts his eyes again. He hears Dabi’s footsteps, the crunch of gravel as he approaches, and a second later, Izuku is lifted. He forces himself to stay limp; Dabi hauls him over his shoulder, complains a bit about the weight, then steps towards the portal.

Izuku waits. He waits until he feels the familiar sensation of the black nothingness tingling his ankles.

And then he opens his eyes and brings his elbow into the back of Dabi’s head as hard as he can.

Dabi makes a strangled sound, loosening his grip. The momentum of Izuku’s hit carries him forward, and Izuku kicks and lets himself fall to the ground. Dabi tumbles into the gate, and it slams shut behind him and vanishes.

Izuku pushes himself off the ground slowly. His shoulder aches from where he’d landed, but it isn’t dislocated. Bruised, perhaps, but nothing he can’t live through. He raises his head, and across from him stands All For One, his black and red tendrils still buried within Kurogiri’s body.

“...Well.” All For One’s voice carries no amusement, no mirth. He flicks his wrist, and Kurogiri folds in on himself and vanishes within his own gate. “Aren’t *you* clever.”

Izuku doesn’t have the chance to come up with a response. One of the black-red tendrils shoots from All For One’s thumb and strikes him in the shoulder. Izuku cries out sharply, but then his breath is gone from his throat a second later, and he feels like there are chains wrapped around his neck.

All For One balls his free hand into a fist and yanks backwards. Izuku is forcefully dragged towards him against his will, even though he slams his heels into the ground to try and stop it, and then suddenly he’s suspended in the air at least three feet off the ground, eye-level with All For One.

All For One doesn't falter. "It is getting increasingly hard for me to resist snapping your neck, Midoriya."

"Good," Izuku gasps. "If it wasn't I'd know I was doing something wrong."

The invisible chains around his throat get tighter. It isn't cutting off his airway yet, but it's close.

"Unbelievable," All For One says, tilting his head sideways. "After all of this, you *still* choose to oppose me. You wielders of One For All really are arrogant, thinking you can hold a candle to me—"

"He beat you."

All For One stops, though he doesn't lower his hand, or Izuku. "What did you say?"

"Your brother, Mirai." Izuku can't breathe, he can barely *see,* but that doesn't matter. "When you two fought, he overpowered you."

All For One's demeanor doesn't change. "There's no way you can possibly know that," he says, and the nothing around Izuku's throat tightens. "You're desperate, child. Trying to stall for as much precious time as you can, but is it worth it? It won't change what happens in the end."

Izuku doesn't let up. "Mirai knew all your weaknesses, and he knew how to use your strengths against you. I'm not rambling. You know this, All For One. You lived this."

Something in the air changes. The *something* around his neck twitches and stutters.

"You've said enough," All For One decides. "I don't know how you know all of this, but I'm officially out of patience."

"Your brother wasn't." *Isn't.* "He could have killed you that day, when you fought for the second time, but he didn't. He wasn't strong enough to kill his flesh and blood, and you took advantage of that and murdered a person who didn't want to fight anymore."

His airway is cut off. He's being strangled. All For One's voice is cold and icy, and it seems to resound throughout the entire area.

"He was weak."

“He loved you,” Izuku gasps. “He was willing to give you another chance because he thought you deserved one. He wanted you to take it, he wanted you to turn back. But you didn’t.”

All For One releases him, and Izuku hits the ground coughing and choking. The voices in his head are silent, completely silent, but there’s a yank in Izuku’s chest, and they feel closer than ever before. His vision flickers; he sees white, seven figures, and then he sees All For One and the darkness of Kamino.

Izuku staggers to his feet. All For One lets him. “You’ve said enough.” All For One raises a hand and points a finger at Izuku. “I will not be preached to by a child who is merely stalling his inevitable end.”

“Did you enjoy it?”

All For One hesitates. “What?”

“Did you enjoy killing them all?” With confidence he doesn’t have, Izuku takes a step forward. “You bragged about it back in the bar. You talked about it like it was some kind of achievement. Did you have fun killing them? Did you enjoy killing people who didn’t want to die?”

All For One lowers his hand slowly. “I find it odd,” he says, tilting his head to one side. “You really *are* just like the rest of them. Stubborn even when you’re faced with death.”

“But it wasn’t enough just for you to kill them,” Izuku says, and All For One watches him. “You weren’t satisfied with just grinding them into the dirt, you wanted to make them give up. That’s why you spared them as many times as you did. That’s why you let Kibō live when you fought Yukō. That’s why you kept attacking Dai when you could’ve ended it sooner. That’s why you blasted Aki off the side of the roof instead of killing him directly. That’s why you never ended things with one blow. You wanted to crush them. You wanted them to look you in the eyes and say, ‘I give up, you win.’ But they didn’t. They never did, none of them.”

He can feel the air changing again, turning into something much more dangerous. His vision flickers again, and he feels both glued to his body and like he’s already left it. All For One is angry, he knows this much, but despite that, despite the fact that Izuku has seen scenes like this before, despite the fact that he could very likely wind up like the ex-holders in this moment,

He takes another step forward.

“Except, All Might almost beat you.” Izuku doesn’t know where he got this courage from. Maybe it’s just hysterics, he can’t tell anymore. “He almost beat you six years ago, didn’t he? You were almost overpowered again.” He pauses a moment, tilts his head. “Is that why you’re so desperate to break the cycle now, All For One? Are you really scared of me?”

“You are a *child,”* All For One barks. It’s the first time he’s actually lost his cool. “I have nothing to fear.”

Izuku doesn’t falter. “Bold of you to say so, *Kansei.”*

This has All For One taking a long step *backwards.* He stands completely still afterwards, staring; and then his arm snaps up, and Izuku is dragged up into the air again and brought closer, until his and All For One’s faces are inches away.

“How do you know that?” All For One demands, and it’s more of a statement than a question. *“Tell me how you know that.”*

Izuku drags in a long breath, as well as he can with the invisible chains around his throat. He grins. “...Little birdie told me.”

Within him, One For All *burns.*

His vision flickers again, and he sees them. All of them.

He reaches out, calls to them, and they answer.

Mirai steps up beside him. He has a thin figure with tired, hunched shoulders, and his shaggy hair hangs over his eyes.

“Nii-san. I’m going to have to ask that you let Midoriya go.”

All For One does, though it may be out of his own shock and not because Mirai told him to. Izuku hits the ground again, gasping, and Mirai takes him by the forearm and helps him to his feet.

“I’m fine,” Izuku says, straightening up and turning towards All For One. “I’m fine, I promise.”

“That’s a relief.” Yukō steps up beside him likewise, facing forward. He’s glaring. “So, All For One. I thought I wouldn’t see *you* again until you finally kicked the bucket, but this is better.”

“Violent, but I agree,” Kibō says, stepping up beside her grandfather.

“What’s up, All For One,” Aki says. “It’s me, ya boy. Here comes Karma.”

“Long past due, if I’m honest.” Dai is there, too, arms crossed over his chest. “You killed *me* young, All For One, but I’ll be damned before I let you take Midoriya, too.”

“Did I hear ‘karma’?” And then there’s Senshi, Nana’s predecessor. She looks just how Izuku imagined her, short but lean with bushy hair done in a ponytail behind her head. “I’ve been waiting for this moment long enough.”

Nana settles a hand on Izuku’s shoulder, and he doesn’t flinch. “You know something, All For One,” she says, lifting her head, “I was already angry at you for killing me, but *now* …now I’m *pissed.”*

All For One stands still, like a deer in the headlights. The air around them crackles with energy, and when Izuku looks down at his hands, his *physical hands,* he watches them flicker. One moment they’re solid; the next moment he can see the ground through them, and they’re covered in scars.

The spirits of the ex-holders aren’t shapeless nothings like they’d been back at the USJ. No, each of them are full-fledged apparitions, with distinguishable features and defining forms.

Izuku has never used the spiritual aspect of One For All to its full 100% before.

Before *now.*

“You’ve ruined a lot of lives, All For One,” Izuku says slowly. “For the people you’ve killed…for the lives you’ve destroyed…this is our requiem. Except, I wonder.” A beat. He tilts his head. “Who will be singing *yours?”*

“You…” All For One’s head is turned towards him, and he doesn’t seem frightened. Calling him merely “frightened” is too much of an understatement to describe All For One’s air. *“What are you doing?”*

There’s something oddly comforting about being a spirit. Izuku has always thought this, at least. Now, he can’t tell if he’s spirit or person; he can’t tell if he’s in or out of his body, can’t determine what this means for him as a whole.

But he grins, with courage supplied by the surrounding spirits of the

people who carried this power before him. The people who have come to mean so much to him. The people he loves.

His hands flicker, and Izuku raises his head and lets the grin split his face wider. More confident.

"Isn't it obvious?" The surrounding air crackles, and within him, One For All pours through his veins like fire. "I'm dissociating."
All For One takes another step backwards, but he's not focused on Izuku anymore. "This isn't possible," he says to the ghosts, shaking his head as though to convince himself. "You're dead."

"Yeah, no joke." Dai glares. "You made sure of *that.* Did you know I was seventeen when you killed me, All For One? Didja know I wasn't ready to die? Did you *care?"*

"You're *dead,"* All For One says again, and he's slowly regaining his composure. "None of you are real."

"You were my best friend," Mirai says quietly, almost too quiet to hear. "We used to skip stones in the pond outside our house. We'd sit on the roof at night and talk about the kinds of people we wanted to be when we grew up. We dreamed of better lives and a better time."

All For One is having a harder time convincing himself, now. "I killed you," he says simply, raising both hands. "I killed you *all."*

"You did kill them." Izuku is scarily calm on the outside, but within him, a storm rages. "You killed them, and leading up to that, you toyed with them. You let them live just a little longer than you had to. You struck them down whenever they got up. But, you know, the past has a way of catching up with us. And your judgement day has been long in the making."

"You don't *scare me,"* All For One says, and Izuku can't tell who he's saying it to anymore. "I have nothing to fear from *you*—"

"Then why are you so desperate to kill me?" Izuku asks, tilting his head to one side. "Are you really as not afraid of me as you claim? You should be afraid, All For One. You should be very afraid. Of me and everyone else you murdered."

One For All crackles against his skin. The air is thick. Izuku is surrounded by the ex-holders, surrounded by these people who've lived, and these people who've died.

Izuku smiles.

"...The dead have no reason to fear the living," he says calmly, but with authority. "But *you,* Kansei, have *every reason* to fear the dead."

All For One raises a hand, and Izuku has seen him do this many times before, in dreamscapes, in memories that aren't his, in things he wishes he could forget. This could be it. This could be *his* final moments, *his* legacy, *his* requiem.

But he's ready for it. The ex-holders are beside him as All For One prepares his attack, and Izuku is waiting for it to come, fists balled, stance set. He doesn't think he can block it, but he can try.

"You've angered me, Midoriya Izuku," All For One says calmly, though Izuku notices the slightest tremble of his hand. "And now, you will join those who came before you."

Nana squeezes Izuku's shoulder. "Try it," she seethes. "Just *try it,* I dare you."

"We're not letting you take him without a fight," Aki says, punching his fist into his open palm. "I've been waiting literal *decades* for this. Alexa," he snaps his fingers, "play You Say Run."

"There's no major water source around here," Yukō says, raising a hand towards the sky, "but it looks pretty cloudy to me. What do you think, Kibō?"

Senshi punches her fist into her open palm. Sparks fly. "Let's do this."

All For One doesn't waver. "Farewell, then," he says, and Izuku sees something form in his palm, something bright and steadily getting bigger. "Now die like those before you."

Izuku takes a step back and braces himself for what he knows is to come. The ex-holders take up their stances, ready to defend, and Izuku clenches his teeth and waits for it.

The blast is fired.

Someone else leaps in from out of nowhere and counters it.

Windows blow out. Izuku throws his hands up in front of his face as a shield. He hears the crunch of metal, roaring winds, pavement being ripped apart. He's aware of the seven figures around him, shielding

him, but even then, he still feels the wind, the shockwave.

It's familiar.

It ends, and he opens his eyes.

All Might is standing between them and All For One, arms held in front of his face. There's steam pouring upwards from his skin, but he doesn't falter, and his form doesn't shake.

Izuku's eyes sting. "T-Toshinori-san…"

All For One is farther back than he'd been before, a reasonable distance away. "So," he says, straightening up again, "you've decided to join the fray. Very well, then."

All Might keeps his back to Izuku, but when he speaks, the words are meant for him. "Midoriya, my boy…" All Might's voice is thick, and to Izuku's shock, it cracks more than once. "I'm sorry I wasn't here before. I'm sorry I couldn't protect you. I'm sorry. I'm *so sorry."*

The tears are falling freely now, and Izuku smiles and shakes his head.

"But you're here now," he says.

There's a beat.

"…Yes." All Might's voice is steadier than before, more determined, and he straightens up and shifts his feet into a more sturdy stance. "Yes, I am."

"Yo, All Might." Dai flashes him a thumbs up. "We've got your back, don't worry 'bout a thing."

"We've *all* got your back," Nana says, falling in line beside the ex-holders as they flank All Might on either side, forming a wall between Izuku and All For One. "We're ready to attack when you are."

All Might nods. "Stay behind us, Midoriya," he says. "We'll beat him, just stay behind us."

Izuku doesn't argue. Already, he can feel things begin to catch up with him. He can feel the strain of using One For All to its full potential, maintaining this connection between the spirit realm and reality. He isn't sure how long he'll be able to hold out.

"Wait, All Might." Izuku staggers forward, but doesn't fall. "All For

One. He has a weak spot, on his side, right where—" His voice trails off, but All Might understands.

"So he injured me in the same place he himself was weak," All Might says, putting his fists in front of his face. "I see. You really are a sick, twisted individual, All For One."

"Yes," All For One says, smiling, "but you already knew that, didn't you?"

All Might doesn't falter. "I may have failed before, but I will not lose to you a second time."

"Very well, then." All For One raises his hand once more. "Let's see how well you can defend yourself *and* your precious student."

"Midoriya!"

Izuku's head turns towards the sky. There's a ramp of ice, stretching upwards, still forming and growing in height and size. It's hard to make out, but Izuku sees them, holding on for dear life while explosions and engines push a small, makeshift cart up the ice.

They fly off the edge, into the sky.

I couldn't reach you before, Midoriya. When you needed me the most, I failed you. I couldn't reach you. I couldn't save you.

But…

"Midoriya!" Todoroki's hand is stretched towards him, reaching. *"Come on!"*

It's impossible, somehow. Seeing them all here. They're right there, above him, and—

He can get to them. They're calling to him, and he can reach them.

The only problem is, he doesn't know if he'll be able to use his physical One For All while pouring his all into the spiritual aspect of it, too. He doesn't think he'll be able to fire it up as he is now, let alone be aware enough to keep up Full Cowl.

So—

“I’ll launch you, kiddo!”

Nana sprints up to him, followed by Aki. All Might and the other holders stay back to keep All For One at bay.

“We’ll take care of things here, but you have to go,” Nana says, crouching and holding out her arms. Her fingers on one hand are curled around her balled fist. “You’ve gotta keep moving!”

Izuku doesn’t think about it. He leaps, and as soon as the bottoms of his shoes touch Nana’s forearms, she launches him up into the sky.

His projectile is off, but that’s okay; Aki comes alongside him, directing the winds, and when they’re close enough, Izuku reaches out.

His hand closes around Todoroki’s, tight at first then tighter, and he can’t help the giddy smile that splits his face, even as the tears fall.

“You guys…” he breathes, something floaty and bubbly forming in his chest. “You’re all too reckless for your own good.”

Todoroki actually smiles at him, and Izuku thinks he sees his eyes shimmer. “Well,” he says, squeezing Izuku’s hand, “we learned from the best.”

Midoriya is safe.

Really, All Might should have expected something like this to happen. Knowing his students, he should’ve suspected they’ve been hatching their own plan to save their friend. All Might knows that, as a teacher, he’ll have to reprimand them later, but for now, he’s relieved.

Midoriya is safe, and All Might can focus on All For One without worrying about his safety.

“He’s safe,” Nana says, stepping up beside him again, and All Might can’t help but think of how odd it is to be standing alongside her, like they’d done in better days, when he was young and she was alive. “We’ll support you, Toshinori, just give us the signal.”

All Might doesn’t know these people, any of them with exception of Nana. These previous holders, the people who wielded this power before him, cultivated it and passed it on. But there’s still a connection there; a very real, tangible *something* he feels when they’re near. One

For All burns more intensely than ever, and he shifts his feet and prepares himself.

“The civilians,” he says. “Evacuate the civilians. I’ll keep All For One’s attention on me.”

“Gotcha,” Nana says, nodding. “We’ll support you from the sidelines.”

“Good luck, Superman,” the youngest says, patting him on the shoulder with a lopsided grin. For a moment, he reminds All Might of Midoriya. “Take out Big Baddie for us. We’ll be back to help finish him off.”

All Might nods, and the spirits disperse.

“So, you really want to take me on alone,” All For One says, raising his head. “Foolish.”

“I’m not alone.” The spirits have vanished from sight, but All Might can still feel them through the energy in the air. Through One For All. “The only person I see standing alone here, is *you.”*

“You’re going to lose him.” All For One’s voice holds an odd mixture of calm and storm. “That boy, Midoriya Izuku. You can’t protect him like this forever. Shigaraki Tomura—”

“Don’t.”

All For One stops, and All Might raises his head.

“You’re wrong,” he says, in a voice that doesn’t leave room for argument. “I already lost Tenko Shimura to you, All For One, but I will *not* lose Midoriya, too.”

All For One smiles. “Your convictions amuse me,” he says, raising a hand. “Now—”

“Fire away!”

Flames burst in out of nowhere, towards All For One. The villain throws up his arms with a counterattack that blasts the fires back, but even so.

Across from them, Senshi whoops, leaps and pounds her fist into the sky.

“...It’s like I said.” All Might shifts positions again, this time retracting

his fist for a blow. “I’m not alone.”

He throws the punch, even as steam rises from his body faster than before, and All For One counters with his own attack. All Might is running out of time—no, he’s out of time—but he’ll do whatever it takes to keep All For One at bay.

The ex-holders are focused primarily on the civilians, but they leap in at unexpected moments, just when All Might needs them. Aki manipulates the winds and sends them; Senshi comes in, hands ablaze; Nana is a good all-round fighter and focuses primarily on small, dirty tricks to keep All For One’s attention elsewhere; Kibō and Yukō bring down the rains, and Dai and Mirai focus more on the civilians than anything else.

They’re distractions at best against All For One, but it gives All Might the openings he needs. And, in this situation, when he can feel his strength waning with every punch, these little distractions make all the difference in the world.

Until—

It’s hard to say how much time has passed since grabbing Todoroki’s hand and actually landing the contraption. They didn’t go too far; Izuku can still hear the fight nearby, can still feel winds as shockwaves shake the area. Todoroki’s hand is on his shoulder, steadying him; Iida is dutifully looking him over, stopping at Izuku’s shoulder.

“You’re bleeding,” he says, and the words remind Izuku of All For One’s black spike hitting him in the shoulder.

He shakes his head. “I’m alright,” he says. His vision isn’t flickering nearly as badly as before, but he isn’t sure about his body. “I’m—I’m alright, I promise. I just, I just need some time.”

His friends aren’t convinced, and it isn’t hard to guess why. A little ways off, Izuku hears roaring winds, crackling fires, crashes, shouts, noise. The ground trembles again, not enough to throw him off balance, but enough for him to know that, yes, the ground is definitely trembling.

A thought hits him. “Wait,” he says, looking to Iida, “Howler was with you before, where—”

“Oy! You guys!”

All heads turn. Kirishima and Yaoyorozu sprint over, and running ahead of them is Howler.

Izuku kneels, holds out his arms, and Howler leaps into them, tail swishing the air and tongue swiping across Izuku’s face. Tears burn his eyes again, but Izuku doesn’t let them fall this time; rather, he wraps his arms around Howler tightly, ignoring the sting in his arm, and buries his face against Howler’s fur.

“I missed you,” he murmurs, voice thick. And then, head raised towards his friends, “I missed *all of you…”*

They smile back at him, aside from Bakugou, who quickly turns the other way, but Izuku doesn’t even care this time. Bakugou’s hostility, for once, isn’t bothering him.

“We should find an ambulance,” Iida says, stepping forward. Izuku releases Howler and straightens up slowly; Todoroki takes hold of his forearm when he sways. “We don’t know how serious that is, not to mention—”

“Is that All Might?”

All heads turn, but Izuku’s is the first. They’re near screens displaying the scene, but farther off, they can see him.

All Might, or rather, Toshinori.

He’s been out of time ever since the start of this fight, and even with the help of the ex-holders, that doesn’t change his time limit. It puts him under less strain, sure, but it does nothing for his own limitations.

“Hang on…” Todoroki’s eyes are wide. “...What? What the *hell?* That’s...I *know him* .”

Izuku says nothing. He can’t.

All Might has gone beyond his limit, and now, everyone knows. The entire world is watching this fight, watching these screens, across Japan and by extension across the globe. They see Toshinori Yagi standing in All Might’s place.

Except that’s the last thing on Izuku’s mind right now.

Because, in this moment, he sees Toshinori’s spirit.

The last time this had happened, he'd been fighting Todoroki. The moment had come and gone in a flash, and Izuku hadn't had much time to think about it in the current situation.

But this time is nothing like that time. It doesn't end in a flicker, in a flash. Izuku isn't in the midst of the battle. He doesn't have any "next move" to contemplate.

Toshinori's form flickers, and Izuku sees all his scars. There are a lot of them. Big, small, on his face, his arms, every visible inch of skin. He's staring All For One down but his demeanor has changed. The ex-holders are still there, but All For One is thwarting them.

It's only a matter of time.

Only a matter of time, before—

No.

No.

Izuku has seen scenes like this what feels like a million times over. One after the other he's witnessed these moments. He'd watched Mirai and All For One face off. He'd watched Yukō and Kibō, Aki and Dai, Senshi and Nana's.

He's seen their bloodiest battles, the end of their lines,

And now he's seeing Toshinori's.

But no.

No.

He straightens up and takes a single step forward. Todoroki reaches for him again lest he trips, but he doesn't.

"You have to win!"

Izuku's voice doesn't sound like his own, and it cracks in more places than he wants to count, but it doesn't matter. His friends turn, but don't stop him. He keeps going.

"You can beat him, All Might!" Izuku screams, and his voice grates against his throat like a chainsaw. Not that he cares. His next shout is louder. *"You have to win!"*

It's simple. It's so simple that Toshinori doesn't know how he could've been blind to it.

He turns towards the shout and suddenly he's back in the teacher's lounge what felt so long ago, and Midoriya is yelling at him and crying and glaring.

"They're like family to me, and so are you!" he'd said. Shouted. *"So don't tell me you won't be there! You have to be there!"*

Toshinori had made a promise that day, a promise that he only now remembers as he looks into his successor's eyes, the same eyes that stared into his as he yelled, the same eyes that stared All For One down, the same eyes that were and still are bright and full of hope.

That's one thing that hasn't changed. Despite Midoriya's obvious physical exhaustion, despite the blood streaking his shirt, despite the *white* in his hair,

There's hope in his eyes, and Toshinori realizes that his successor believes in him with his whole heart. Not specifically in the person of All Might anymore, but rather, in the person of Yagi Toshinori.

Midoriya's shout sparks something in the rest of the crowd, and soon they're all shouting, all cheering, all yelling their encouragements.

"Don't let that guy beat you, All Might!"

"We believe in you! You can do this!"

"Come on!"

"Go! Beat him!"

"You can do it!"

"Show him what for!"

"You've got this!"

"Please win, All Might!"

Toshinori doesn't know how he does it, but as Midoriya leans against Todoroki and stares into his eyes, desperate, *pleading,* Toshinori meets his gaze and smiles.

Then he turns back to All For One.

Nana swings a kick at All For One's head. All For One counters with a blast, one that Nana leaps to the side to avoid. She skids and stops just beside Toshinori, grinning madly.

"You've got one hell of a successor, Toshinori," she says, though her eyes never leave All For One. "That kid really loves you a lot, you know." She pauses, meets his eyes. "...That look on your face." She glances at All For One; Yukō and Kibō bring water down on his head, and a second later, Senshi does the same, but with flames. "It's totally different from before. You've found your resolve."

Re-found it, more like. Toshinori nods, then puts up his fists. "Tell him to let go."

Nana blinks. "What?"

"Please, tell Midoriya to let go of One For All." Toshinori raises his head; Dai has just dragged a civilian out from underneath a collapsed building and is leading them off, and the other ex-holders flock nearby. "He's been doing this for too long, and he's never used it this way before. You have to tell him to let go of it. I'll take care of All For One from here on out."

Nana holds his gaze for a long moment, then nods. "Alright," she says, punching him on the shoulder as she turns away. "I'll leave it to you, then, kiddo! We believe in you."

She leaves, and Toshinori smiles faintly at her retreating back.

Then, he turns his eyes back to All For One. The rest of the spirits have fallen back likewise, following Nana's lead and taking as many civilians with them as they can, and All For One lets them go.

"So, you're fighting me alone now."

"Seems so," Toshinori says, nodding.

"You'll lose," All For One intones. "You'll lose and you'll die just like the people before you."

"No, I won't." Toshinori lifts his head and drags up the final shattered pieces of One For All within him, one last time. "There's a million things I haven't done. Most importantly…" Midoriya's words flash through his ears again. "...I need to be there for him."

"You really care that much about him, do you." It's not a question. "I

wonder how he'll feel, watching his mentor be murdered right in front of him."

"As long as I have any say in it, that isn't going to happen." He remembers Midoriya's words, remembers *his side, he has a weakness,* and balls his fist. "I promised I'd be here for him, and I'm not about to break that promise."

"So be it."

There's no dramatic pause, no final monologue. All For One launches his attack, and Toshinori, *All Might,* crafts, waits for it, and launches his counter.

Izuku doesn't see the final blow, but he feels it. He feels something stir within him, something change in the air around him. He doesn't have to open his eyes, but he does, and he sees All Might with his bloody fist raised towards the sky, trembling, but triumphant.

There's a long stretch of silence in between the final blow and the moment the onlookers lose it. When that moment ends, Izuku's ears fill with noise, with a whooping, cheering din as hundreds of people clap and celebrate this victory. Around him, his friends are shrieking and whooping. Kirishima tackles Bakugou in a hug, and Bakugou's furious yelling is drowned out by Uraraka's whoops and Iida's applause.

Victory has never left Izuku this giddy before, and despite everything, he laughs shakily, even as he staggers. Todoroki has to steady him, but he too is smiling.

"It's okay," Izuku chokes out, almost unable to believe it. "It's *okay—"*

"Hey, kiddo! Izuku!"

Izuku raises his head, and Todoroki follows his gaze. Nana sprints towards them. The crowds are too busy whooping and cheering to take notice, and Nana weaves between the onlookers and finally reaches Izuku.

Izuku feels Todoroki tense beside him, which he only assumes is fair considering Nana's...well...dead. He meets Nana's eyes, and she reaches out and touches his shoulder.

“You’ve done enough,” she says, moving her hand from his shoulder to his cheek. Her touch is cold, but gentle, if not hesitant. “You can let it go now, Izuku. You’ve been fighting for so long. It’s over now. You can let it go.”

Izuku can’t manage anything more than a nod, and Nana straightens up and looks at Todoroki.

“So, you’re Thermostat,” she says, smiling. “Do me a favor and look after Midoriya for me, would you? Take care of him.”

Todoroki’s face doesn’t change, but the arm he has around Izuku’s shoulders tightens. “I will.”

“Thank you,” Nana says, and she turns to Izuku again, holding his gaze. “Don’t forget,” she says, and then, she turns and sprints away.

Izuku doesn’t wait. He looks at Todoroki for a moment, then takes in a deep breath and drops his hold of One For All.

The bridge he opened between reality and the spirit realm shuts, and his vision goes black. He isn’t aware he’d collapsed until he opens his eyes, on the ground in Todoroki’s arms, surrounded by the anxious voices of his friends and Howler’s frantic barks.

He blinks slowly, hardly aware of his surroundings. He’s crashed. Everything’s come back to him now, *everything,* and this is the result.

His friends are talking to him, asking him questions, but he can barely hear them. They’re worried, and he wants to reassure them, wants to say he’s okay, but he can’t. He’s overwhelmed with what feels like the weight of the entire world, and with blurry vision, he raises his head.

The words *“You’re next”* resonate across the area as the cheers of the crowd fills the air. Above them, the first ray of sunlight stretches across the sky, piercing through the dark, and Izuku transfixes his eyes on this single beam. It’s the first time he’s seen the sunlight in days.

“Look, you guys…”

His friends fall silent, and when Izuku raises a shaking finger to point at the sky, his friends follow it. He smiles, and the tears break free for the first of many times to come.

“Look…” Izuku chokes on the lump in his throat, caught somewhere in between sobbing and laughing. “...We made it to tomorrow.”

There’s a beat.

His friends tackle him between them, tighter than ever, and Izuku hugs them back fiercely and *cries.*

Chapter End Notes

> *"Raise a glass to freedom,*
> *Something they can never take away.*
> *No matter what they tell you...*
>
> *Tomorrow there'll be more of us,*
> *Telling the story of tonight."*

So Big / So Small

Chapter Summary

"So Big / So Small" from Dear Evan Hansen

“No matter what, I’ll be here,
When it all feels so big, ‘till it all feels so small.”

Chapter Notes

ART!! :D

bananasenseidotgov

chiangyorange

Thank you so much!! Enjoy the chapter~ :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku is only half aware of what happens after that. When he’s exhausted his tears (for now) and the adrenaline finally wears off, he feels something...odd. He’s never been the best at judging when “enough is enough” when it comes to pushing his limits and surpassing them, but this time, it’s pretty obvious.

There has always been a defining *something* with his Quirk that he couldn’t go over. A wall put up between what was safe and what wasn’t safe. Now, he’s pretty sure that wall is in pieces.

He’s aware of the medics swarming them, of hands on his arms pulling him away from his friends. Stricken with a bolt of panic, he reaches out blindly, fingers curling around Todoroki’s wrist and holding tight. He doesn’t want to let go. He feels wrong and scared and he’s so *tired* —

“It’s okay, Midoriya.” Todoroki’s voice is soft, but clear even through Izuku’s ringing ears. “It’s okay, we’ll be right behind you. We’ll come visit you, okay? But right now you need to let go.”

He *doesn’t want to.* He only just got his friends back, he missed them so much, he doesn’t want to let them go.

“We’ll be there, Deku.” Uraraka’s fingers touch his shoulder. “We’re

going to be there with you, okay? We'll follow the ambulance to the hospital, it's going to be okay."

"Let them take care of you, buddy." Kirishima's voice is there too. "You're safe now, they've gotcha."

"And we will be there shortly." Iida's voice. "We'll all be together again before you even know it."

Izuku holds on to these words, shuts his eyes, and finally lets go of his consciousness. The abyss he falls into is darker and deeper than any he's fallen into before.

There's something very peaceful about the look on Midoriya's face. Even as the medics pull him out of Shouto's arms and load him onto the stretcher, even as they hook him up to only God knows what, even though he's completely unconscious now and hurt and his hair is almost completely *white,*

He looks peaceful. Somehow, he looks peaceful. Maybe for now that's enough.

Howler must know Midoriya is in safe hands, because he doesn't try to rush forward or get to Midoriya like he had been before. Shouto doesn't know *how* the dog knows this, but he must, considering he stays glued to Shouto's side and doesn't try getting to Midoriya.

"Todoroki."

Iida settles his hand on Shouto's shoulder, but they're both transfixed on Midoriya as the doctors load him into the ambulance. Uraraka, Yaoyorozu, Kirishima, and Bakugou step up alongside them on either side.

"We should go to the hospital now," Iida says. His voice is quiet, reserved. He doesn't give a reason, and he doesn't need to.

"I'll stay behind and help the doctors with the civilians," Yaoyorozu tells them. "I happen to have a bit of experience myself, and I can make bandages if they run short."

"I'll stay too," Bakugou says, and unlike Yaoyorozu, he doesn't give a reason. Those words are all he says, and no one argues with them.

"Alright." Iida nods. "I'll keep in contact with you all and let you

know how things progress from here. When we have word on Midoriya, I'll text you through the group chat, Yaoyorozu."

Yaoyorozu nods. Behind them, the ambulance starts up and zips down the road, towards the hospital. "Please, keep me updated," she says, nodding. "Let me know how he is as soon as you can."

Iida nods. "I will."

As they leave, with Howler trotting at his side, Shouto looks over his shoulder. He sees the man, Yagi Toshinori, the "friend of the Midoriyas" surrounded by medics, being looked over. He's saying something, trying to push them away, but they're not letting him go, insistent on looking him over and treating his injuries.

Yagi Toshinori. All Might.

There's something here that isn't clicking, but Shouto doesn't pay it mind. There'll be time for that, after he makes sure Midoriya is okay.

All across Japan, the report blares through the televisions. In homes, in shops, on the big screens in the plaza, everywhere. Everyone sees it. Everyone listens.

"In the aftermath of the incident at Kamino Ward, civilians are asked to help scour the debris to find victims. We're still getting an official count from the police, but there have been seventy nine reported injuries. There have been no recorded fatalities yet to speak of."

"Ma'am, we're calling on behalf of your son, Midoriya Izuku. He's being treated in the hospital by Kamino Ward, please get down here as soon as you can."

Inko doesn't have to hear the rest of the doctor's words. She yanks on her shoes and flies out the door, barely remembering to close and lock it behind her. Once she's made it down the steps (going two at a time, which is hard on her knees but it's fine, it doesn't matter), she sprints down the sidewalk as fast as her legs can carry her. She hops onto the nearest bullet train, heedless of the cost, and takes it all the way to the hospital.

She'd seen the news, and right up until leaving the house, she'd been watching it, too. She'd seen the Kamino Ward incident. She'd seen the spirits. She'd seen All For One and All Might's face off.

She puts it all out of her mind. The only thing she has the mental strength to think about right now is her son in the hospital. It's the one thing here that truly matters to her. Everything else can come later.

"The villain, 'All For One,' is being taken by the police to the deepest parts of Tartarus, from which he will never return. In regards to our symbol of peace, All Might, it is hard to say exactly what will become of this situation, but most of us already have a suspicion. I've received news that his injuries are not life-threatening and that he will make a full recovery, with time."

"Damn it, what happened!?"

"I don't know, his heart rate suddenly increased—!"

"Get him on oxygen, and bring me something to get his fever down!"

"His levels are dropping—"

"Don't let them! Get him on an IV, if we don't hurry we're going to lose him!"

Tenya had hoped he was done with hospitals. At this point, if he never has to step through one again, he'll be the happiest person on the planet. He's been in them too many times, too many times for the sake of people he loves, and he never wants to do it again. At the very least, he never wants to step into a hospital as a *visitor* ever again.

Midoriya's mother is here already, seated on one of the chairs in the waiting room. Her head is down, hands folded loosely in her lap, and she looks more weary and frail than ever before.

Tenya takes one look at the others, nods at them, and as a group, they move towards Inko.

Howler reaches her first, sprinting towards her and bumping his nose against her knee. She jumps with a gasp, tears flying when her head snaps up, but she relaxes as soon as she recognizes him.

"Hi, Howler," she says, voice wavering, and she runs a hand through his fur gently. Her hands are shaking. "Izuku is going to be okay. He's going to be, I—" She stops, raising her head to the others. "Oh," she says, hastily wiping away her tears, "sorry, I—give me a moment, I'm

alright, kids, I'm sorry—"

"It's okay," Uraraka says, reaching out tentatively, though she makes no further move. "It's—it's okay, Inko-san."

Todoroki stares at the ground, Kirishima doing likewise, and Tenya doesn't know what he's supposed to do, what he's supposed to say. Midoriya's mother has always struck him as a very strong individual, just like the son she raised, but now she's in the middle of something that no mother should ever face.

Something Tenya watched his own mother go through.

"I'm sorry," Inko says, lifting her head towards them. "I'm alright now, just...a little overwhelmed."

It's understandable. Tenya nods stiffly and bites the inside of his cheek.

"How...how bad is it?" Kirishima asks tentatively, eyes shimmering. "Midoriya, he, I mean...did the doctor say anything about his condition?"

Inko swallows hard, then shakes her head. "Not yet," she says. "They brought him in a while ago, but there isn't any news—"

As though on cue, a doctor steps out from the hallway, looking drawn and exhausted. "For Midoriya Izuku?" he says, and everyone's on their feet at once, rushing over. The look on the doctor's face is already enough to stab Tenya in the chest with dread.

"You're his mother?" the doctor asks Inko, completely ignoring the others, and Inko nods feverishly.

"Is he okay?" she begs. "Please, tell me he's okay—"

"We're operating on him at the moment," the doctor says, cutting no corners, "but I won't lie to you, his condition has deteriorated severely since he was first brought in. We have him on a blood transfusion at the moment, but we can't even run tests until we bring his fever down."

"So that's it?" Inko's eyes are wide. "Is that all? There has to be something else you can do for him, please, he's my *son—"*

"I know." The doctor shuts his eyes and lets out a long, heaving sigh.

“I know, I know, I’m sorry. I promise you, we’ll do whatever we can to make sure he gets out of this. Just, keep holding onto that as well, alright? He’s a strong boy.”

Inko brings her hands to cover her mouth, tears spilling over her fingers, but she nods feverishly. The doctor turns away, leaving her behind, and she makes no move to stop him, follow him, or question him further.

“Crap.” Kirishima claps his hand to his head, teeth gritted. “And here I was thinking everything was finally okay.”

Tenya’s head is spinning. He’d known it was bad from the beginning, ever since Midoriya finally lost the battle for his consciousness, but this...this is just...

“We…” Inko takes in a long breath, and her eyes flicker over to the empty chairs nearby. “We should...we should sit down again.”

They do. All except for Howler, who leaps into Inko’s lap as soon as he can.

“This just in, we received news not too long ago regarding U.A. student Midoriya Izuku. Earlier today, he was was successfully retrieved by the heroes and taken to the hospital for intensive car. However, regarding his state of mind and wellbeing, the doctors have yet to say. For now, all we can do is wait, and hope for his recovery.”

They’re there for literal hours. Shouto doesn’t want to be here for a second longer than he absolutely has to. The smell of antiseptic is thick in the air, and the atmosphere is even thicker, filled with tension and despair and fear. He wants to be able to do something. He wants to get up and pace the floor, something, *anything* other than just sit here and think.

He doesn’t like his thoughts very much right now. They all have to do with Midoriya, and they all scare him.

The early morning goes on, and it occurs to Shouto that he and the others have been awake for almost a full twenty four hour period. Twenty four hours. From the moment they woke up, to now.

Twenty four hours. While at Kamino, Shouto felt like literal days had passed, although it’d probably only lasted for a full hour or two. Now,

in the aftermath of it, with only his own thoughts as his friends are silent, time passes even slower.

He isn't tired. He's not sure he'll ever be tired again, not until he knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that Midoriya is safe. He sits, hands folded, eyes staring forward at nothing, and Uraraka has her hand on Inko's forearm comfortingly, and Kirishima is twiddling his thumbs, and Iida is bouncing his leg and drumming his fingers against his knee, just as antsy as Shouto feels. The anticipation is killing him. He needs to know. It's been too long and the doctors are too quiet. It's *been too long.* There should be news by now, there should be *news by now—*

The same doctor steps down the hallway and searches the room for a moment, until his eyes land on Inko and the group. He makes a small gesture with his hand, and Inko is already on her feet. She moves, and the others leap to their feet and follow.

"How is he?" Inko asks, and her voice wavers more than once. "Is he okay? Can we see him? Is he—"

"He's not currently awake," the doctor cuts in, and his voice carries a weight to it that makes Shouto feel even worse. "We treated his injuries and we were able to bring his fever down some, but I won't lie to you. The situation is...less than ideal."

Shouto's heart stops. He hears Inko inhale sharply, "What?"

The doctor folds his hands together in front of him and looks down at his feet for a long moment. "We stitched the lacerations on his shoulder and back," he says, "and we were able to replenish the blood he lost. His fever is down to a safer level, and while it isn't gone, it's stabilized. But, we can't get him to wake up."

The words strike Shouto somewhere in his chest, right by his heart.

"What do you mean?" It's Uraraka who speaks, and her voice is soft and scared. "Do—what if he's just unconscious? Is—is that—?"

The doctor is already shaking his head. "I'm afraid not," he says, and there's something deep in his eyes, a pain that Shouto *doesn't like.* "We've kept a close eye on him and we've been monitoring his levels for quite some time now. He has the heart rate of someone who is sleeping, not unconscious. Now, I don't know the extent of what he went through at the hands of the villains, but...there's one more thing I'd like to discuss with you."

He takes in a long breath, and when he opens his eyes again, he's looking at Shouto. Then at Tenya. Then at Uraraka and Kirishima.

"I'm not sure this is something you want to hear," he says gently. "Perhaps you should—"

"We want to hear it," Kirishima blurts, and all heads turn towards him. "I'm—I'm sorry for interrupting, but, Midoriya is our friend. We wanna hear everything."

In silent agreement, Shouto, Uraraka, and Iida nod. The doctor looks to Inko for approval, and when she does the same, he sighs, but goes on.

"Alright." He pulls up his clipboard and flips back a page. "We had to perform a small operation on his heart. Nothing major, but when we first hooked him up, our readings showed irregular heartbeat. We repaired that, but he still has yet to regain consciousness. Furthermore...I don't know how many of you saw, but...his hair has turned almost completely white."

Shouto knows this. Iida knows this. Uraraka knows this. Kirishima knows this. Back at Kamino Ward, Yaoyorozu and Bakugou know this.

But Inko does not know this. She hasn't seen Midoriya since before the training camp.

"What?" She has both hands covering her mouth again, eyes wide. "His—he's—"

The doctor drags in another breath, holds it, then lets it out. "Have any of you ever heard of Marie Antoinette Syndrome?"

Iida's hand goes in the air. "I have," he says quietly. "I did my own research on the condition recently."

The doctor nods stiffly. "You already know this," he says, "but, for the sake of those of you who do not...Marie Antoinette Syndrome is a condition that is the result of critical amounts of emotional and psychological stress. Not everyone believes the legitimacy of this condition, and it isn't something we can rightfully prove in this day and age, but, I do believe the signs are there."

Inko's face has gone two shades paler than what's healthy. "So you're saying—Izuku—he—"

“I’m sorry,” the doctor says, “I truly am. I’m…I’m very sorry. Until we hear a witness account or Izuku regains consciousness, we won’t have a way of determining exactly what he went through while he was with the villains. We can speculate, but…I don’t think speculation is a good thing to turn to in this situation.”

“Is there anything else?” Inko asks, eyes wide. “Please tell me that’s it, please.”

The silence stretches. “…We’ve been monitoring his vital signs closely ever since he was brought in, as I’ve already told you,” he starts slowly, “however…he will not regain consciousness. Logically, he should have regained it a long time ago. His vital signs are normal, his heartrate is one of a sleeping individual, not an unconscious one, and yet, as I’ve already mentioned…he will not wake up.”

Kirishima’s eyes are desperate. “He’s probably just, I don’t know, maybe he passed out or something.”

“It’s been hours,” the doctor says, “and nothing has changed. He should have shown some sign of rousing at this point, regardless, but there has been nothing. It isn’t a coma, it isn’t unconsciousness. On all accounts, he should wake up any second now. But he won’t.”

Shouto’s head is full of cotton. His ears ring. Nothing makes sense anymore.

Midoriya should be awake now.

But he isn’t.

“We’re allowing family in to see him, at the moment,” the doctor goes on, “but, only immediate family, I’m afraid. As for the rest of you…you’ll have to wait until we’re sure his condition has stabilized.”

“Yeah, we—we get it.” Kirishima’s voice cracks. “Just, yeah, we get it, just, tell us when we can visit.”

The doctor nods stiffly. “Midoriya-san,” he says, turning to Inko, “if you would like, I will escort you to your son.”

Inko nods shakily, and follows the doctor down the long hallway. Shouto watches them go numbly until they turn the corner and disappear from his sight.

Kirishima takes a step backwards and jabs his thumb across the room.

“I’m—I’m just gonna…yeah, I’ll—I’m gonna—be right back.” He makes a beeline for the restroom on the other side of the room, and the door slams behind him.

They’re back to this. Back to this waiting game.

But now, it’s worse than ever before.

Playing the waiting game for literal hours had been absolute agony, but Inko can’t tell which is worse: sitting in the foyer of the hospital waiting for news, or stepping into her son’s hospital room, knowing the truth.

The curtains are drawn closed, blocking out the sunlight, and Inko steps into the room. The first thing that really hits her is the noise. It’s quiet, of course, but there are a lot of different things creating a lot of different sounds which come together to stab at her heart. The heart monitor beeping, an oxygen tank humming, the drip of an IV, steady breathing, everything.

The doctor shuts the door to give her privacy, and Inko practically throws herself across the room to reach the bedside.

She’s seen Izuku in states like this before. She’s had to get used to it. Catching his body when he was careless with it, ever since he was four years old and just figuring things out, and then more recently, too, when he’d come home and told her he was being bullied, when he’d abandon his body just because he didn’t like the way he felt in it, because he didn’t have to feel nearly as much while he was a spirit…

But this. This is *wrong. This* is so wrong that it makes her want to be sick.

There are dark circles under Izuku’s closed eyes, and the better half of his hair is *white.* The only thing that remains of his hair’s natural color is the lower quarter of it, but aside from that, his hair is entirely white. White enough to be noticeable even in the darkness while Inko’s eyes are still adjusting.

And it’s not just that, either. Inko reaches out to touch his hand, and his wrists are bandaged. She doesn’t know what’s beneath them, but she doesn’t want to. There are bandages on his collar, too, which disappear under his hospital gown, and she doesn’t want to know what’s under *those,* either.

She's had to get used to seeing her son unconscious, but she'll ever, *ever* get used to seeing him like this. She can't. She won't. She *will not.* Never.

She squeezes his fingers, and when the tears break free again, they don't stop for a long, long time.

There's a vase of flowers on the side table. Kouta watches them slowly, admiring their features. He wouldn't normally do this. Normally he'd be the type of kid to pluck the petals from their stem and toss them into the river to watch them float down.

But he doesn't. He observes them, white poppies cradled in a small, simple but quaint vase brought in by Mandalay much earlier today. He wouldn't dare harm them. Not now.

Ragdoll is unconscious on the hospital bed, hooked up to more things that Kouta wants to count. She's been this way ever since Kouta first arrived and the doctors escorted him and Mandalay here, and despite his best efforts, despite the words he speaks and when he reaches out and touches her hand, she will not wake up.

The doctors don't know what's wrong with her. They said she was in a deep state of unconsciousness, not *too* far gone, but far gone enough. Last he heard they don't expect her to wake up any time soon, but that doesn't change Kouta's own hopes. The doctors had said it was impossible for her to wake up soon, and he's going to hope against that with all his might.

The door creaks open behind him, and he hears soft footsteps. He's heard them enough times to know who they belong to.

"Hey." Mandalay sinks into the chair beside his, and although she tries meeting his eyes, Kouta isn't having it. "...Are you…?"

"I'm fine," Kouta snaps, hugging his knees tighter to his chest. *"I'm* fine."

Mandalay bites her lip and turns away. "The doctors are hopeful," she says, offering him a small smile that he doesn't return. Can't return. "They ran some tests earlier, they said she'll wake up within the week, you know. She's going to be fine."

"What about Midoriya?"

Something in Mandalay's eyes change. "...Kouta…"

"I heard the doctors talking." It hurts to say the words, but he says them anyway. "I shouldn't have listened but I did. They don't know if he'll be okay, do they? They don't know anything."

"They're trying," Mandalay says, completely dodging the question. "They're going to do whatever it takes to save him, just like they did for Ragdoll."

"But what if they can't?"

Kouta thinks of Midoriya, about the person who shouldn't have given a damn about him, about the person who saved him regardless of Kouta's hostility. About the person who summoned two spirits that reminded Kouta *so much* of his mother and father. The person who promised he'd be okay. The person who did whatever he could to protect him.

Ragdoll is going to be okay. Kouta knows this.

But Midoriya's fate is still completely up in the air.

"...Would you like me to bring something for him?" Mandalay asks quietly. "Would you like me to see if I can leave flowers in his room, too?"

Kouta doesn't answer, but Mandalay knows him well enough. She smiles, touches his shoulder lightly, then rises to her feet and makes for the door.

"Mandalay."

She pauses, turning back to him. Kouta pulls a folded piece of paper from his pocket and stretches his hand towards her.

"This is for him," Kouta says, and he covers up the crack in his voice with a clear of the throat. "If you can give it to him...please."

The paper leaves his hand, and he can almost feel Mandalay's smile bearing into his back. "I will," she promises, and the door opens and closes behind her.

Howler goes home with Inko, which leaves Shouto alone. Uraraka, Iida and Kirishima all go their separate ways to their separate homes, and while a part of Shouto wants to stay with them, to say some kind

of brilliant final encouraging words, he can't muster anything.

So he says nothing. He goes home, and he says nothing. Fuyumi hugs him tight and puts her hands on his shoulders, asking if he's okay, but he says nothing. He falls into bed and lays face down, phone in his hand, and he remembers the time Midoriya texted him from the hospital after he was injured by Stain.

He wants Midoriya to say something.

But he doesn't.

"Regarding the incident at Kamino Ward, there is another thing the people are dying to know. The real question everyone is asking has to do with the seven mysterious figures who assisted All Might in his battle against the notorious villain, All For One. We have had no prior record of these beings, and our photos of them have come back blank.

"On a slightly different topic, civilians say that they found a memorial dedicated to 'the heroes the world has forgotten,' located atop a hill near the shores of Dagobah beach. It is unknown whether there is any connection between this and those figures, but regardless, on behalf of the whole of Japan, we would like to thank whoever constructed the memorial. To the mysterious heroes who fought All For One, to the heroes who have died on the line of duty, to the heroes we may not even know about, I am sure they will never be forgotten.

"If anyone has any information regarding the seven heroes who battled alongside All Might, please come forward."

Ochako is standing by the shrine at Dagobah beach, her hair blowing gently in the breeze. The sun is setting on the horizon. Another day gone. She'd slept some in her apartment that afternoon, called her parents to ask how their flight went. It got delayed, apparently, and they won't be here until early tomorrow morning, which is fine. She doesn't want them to see her cry anyway, so it's almost, *almost* perfect.

She stares into the horizon, alone, and the shrine is so simple, yet so meaningful. There are sealed envelopes around it, flowers of all sorts; white poppies, marigolds, roses. There are little stones pinning the envelopes down, and the stones have things written on them, words like *thank you* and *you'll never be forgotten,* the likes. Ochako wants to put something of her own, here, but she doesn't know what.

She knows Deku set this up. There's no way he didn't. He's just the kind of person who would do that, too. The thought makes her want to cry again.

"Oh, are you missing someone?"

Ochako jumps and whirls around. A little boy and a little girl blink back at her. They're both holding bottles with little messages folded inside of them.

"In a way," Ochako says quietly, turning fully to face the children. "My friend is hurt right now. I'm worried about him."

The two children—probably brother and sister, judging by the similarities of their looks—share a glance, then turn back towards her.

"We're worried about someone, too," says the girl, stepping towards Ochako. "We wanted to leave these bottles here to wish him good luck."

"That's very sweet of you," Ochako says, smiling gently. Talking with them is a nice distraction; it helps keep her mind off of Deku, which is good. "Who is this person? Is he a family member? A friend?"

"Not really," the boy says, hopping up alongside his sister, "but he's a hero, and he's really cool. He saved us once when we were in trouble and everything."

"It was really cool!" the girl gushes, something twinkling in her eyes. "He was so amazing, you should've seen him! I think I want to be a hero when I grow up now because of him. The way he jumped right in there to save us was really really cool!"

Ochako laughs softly, and it sounds fake and broken, even to her. "I know someone like that, too," she says, turning back towards the shrine. "Someone I look up to a lot. He doesn't know it, but everything he does, every time he raises his head and determinedly chases something...it makes me want to do the same."

The kids tilt their heads to the same side in unison. "Do you like him?" the girl asks.

Ochako stops. She doesn't really have to think about it, but she turns back towards the sky and watches the blue turn into orange as the sun sets beyond the waters.

"...I do," she says, folding her hands behind her back. "I do like him. A lot. He's one of my best friends, and...I don't know where I would be without him."

"You should tell him," the boy pipes up. "You said he's hurt now, right?"

Ochako pauses, but nods. "Mm."

"Well, as soon as he's better," the girl says, looking first at her brother and then at Ochako, "you should tell him how you feel! That's what we're going to do." She bumps her brother's shoulder with her own, eliciting a smile from the both of them. "As soon as we can, we're going to go to the hospital and tell him everything we just told you!"

"And we're going to write new notes to give him!" At this, the boy holds up his bottle for Ochako to see. "That way he knows how cool he is!"

Ochako can't help but smile, even as the tears burn her eyes. The words *when he's better* echo through her head again. They're words she can hold onto. Words she can, perhaps, look forward to.

"I'm sure he'd appreciate that, whoever he is," Ochako says fondly. "And I'll tell him how I feel, too. I promise."

The boy and girl beam at her, then race past her towards the shrine. She doesn't stop them, rather watches. The girl and boy settle their bottles of notes against the stone, kneel by it for a long moment, then bounce to their feet and turn towards Ochako again, beaming.

"There!" says the girl. "Done!"

Ochako giggles softly and shakes her head. It really was a blessing, running into these kids. "That, that it is," she says, nodding. "Do you need someone to walk you home, or—?"

"No, Mom and Dad are waiting for us by the shore," the boy answers with a smile, and he turns and grabs his sister's hand and tugs her along. "Come on, Nee-chan! We should hurry before they worry!"

The girl nods. "Bye, Miss!" she says, waving a hand as her brother drags her along. "I hope your friend gets better soon!" Her brother raises his free hand to wave at her likewise, and Ochako smiles and waves back.

“Whoa there, hold on!”

The kids nearly bump into Kirishima as he makes his way up the hill. “Sorry!” the kids apologize in unison, sprinting around him and continuing on their way.

“Don’t trip!” Kirishima hollers after them, and as soon as they’re gone, he turns and looks towards Ochako. She meets his gaze and holds it for a long moment, and he walks towards her.

“Hey,” she greets quietly.

“Hey,” he replies, stepping up to stand beside her. The ocean shines as the sun sets, and it’s probably one of the most gorgeous sights Ochako has ever seen. If her mind hadn’t been so cluttered with darker, scarier thoughts of Deku’s condition, she might even be able to enjoy it.

“...I had no idea Midoriya had something like this set up,” Kirishima comments quietly, eyes turned towards the shrine. “I mean, I really should’ve known. It’s such a *Midoriya* thing of him to do, with or without the whole,” he twirls his finger by his temple, finding the words, “summoning dead people thing.”

Ochako swallows hard, then nods. They watch the sunset for a time.

“...Hey, Uraraka...I don’t think we should worry.”

Ochako’s face doesn’t change. “Why do you say that?”

“Midoriya’s always been strong for us,” Kirishima answers shortly. “Always. He’s always....” He pauses, takes a breath. “He’s always trying to look on the better side of things, y’know? He’s always trying to lift us up and be our encouragement when we can’t find any ourselves. I think...right now, especially right now...we need to be doing that for him.”

It’s true. He’s right. She agrees.

But that doesn’t mean it’s *easy,* because it’s going to be one of the hardest things Ochako’s ever done.

Toshinori wakes up in the hospital.

He sits upright immediately, which sends an aching pain through his head and bandaged, slinged arm, but it’s nothing he can’t ignore easily. Everything rushes back at him in a flash; the fight, the final

blow, Midoriya's eyes—

Midoriya.

"Whoa, hold on, settle down."

Naomasa is there, hand stretched towards him, seated on a stool by the bedside. "Take it easy there," Naomasa coaxes. His brow is pinched, and he looks more exhausted than Toshinori has ever seen him. "You've had a rough time of it, don't try to do anything too fast."

Toshinori couldn't care *less* about doing things too fast. "Midoriya," he says, and the name feels thick on his tongue. "Midoriya, *where's Midoriya?"*

Something in the air makes a sharp, dark turn. Naomasa looks at the ground for a long moment, and his shoulders slump like he has a great weight on them.

"...He's here," Naomasa says. "He's here in the hospital, and he's alive. He's being treated by the doctors, and none of his injuries are life-threatening. But, for some reason, they can't get him to wake up."

Toshinori's head spins. "What do you mean they— *what?"*

"He isn't unconscious, and he isn't in a coma," Naomasa says thickly, "but he won't wake up. They don't know why. They don't have a *clue,* but the fact still remains."

Toshinori feels like something was just ripped viciously out of his chest. "Can I see him?" he asks immediately. "His mother wrote me as one of Midoriya's emergency contacts, I should be allowed to—"

"Toshinori, *you're in a hospital,"* Naomasa cuts in, settling a heavy hand on Toshinori's shoulder. "And you're not visiting, you're *admitted.* You aren't going anywhere until the doctors make sure you're alright."

"But—Midoriya—"

"I know." Naomasa squeezes his shoulder. "I *know,* but Toshinori, these doctors are already dealing with a lot right now. They can't have you acting reckless on top of everything else."

Toshinori doesn't *like it,* but he can't argue with it, either. His shoulders slump, and he shuts his eyes for a long moment.

"...You're right," he says, and he hates those words. "You're right, I'm...I'm sorry."

"Don't apologize to me." Naomasa takes his seat again. "Aizawa was the same way, you know. He isn't injured, but he wanted to see Midoriya as well and was told off by the doctors. They only just got Midoriya to stabilize recently, they can't risk anyone other than immediate family visiting right now."

Toshinori nods slowly. "How long have you been here?"

"About…" Naomasa checks his watch. "...Thirteen hours. You were brought in a while ago."

"Tsukauchi—"

"I know, I know, 'I didn't have to do that,'" Naomasa says, shaking his head, "but *someone* had to be here when you woke up. That, and…" The air changes, and he folds his hands. "...There's something I need to tell you. About All For One."

Toshinori blinks. "...What about him?"

Naomasa takes a breath. "This is confidential information, of course," he says, "so it isn't something to go spreading around—"

"Tsukauchi. Tell me."

"He's not expected to live." The silence stretches long after these words, and Naomasa threads his fingers together loosely and sighs. "There's a team of doctors treating him in Tartarus, but...they've been at it for about as long as I've been sitting here, and I just received word that they aren't expecting him to live another day."

Toshinori doesn't know how he feels about this. On one hand, All For One is a villain, a murderer, but on the other...he doesn't know. He hates All For One, he always has and he always will, but hearing the words *they aren't expecting him to live another day* genuinely shock him.

"I'll...give you some time to kind of, process that." Naomasa gets to his feet. "I'll let you know the second I have news. Until then, I have to meet with Aizawa."

Toshinori frowns. "What about?"

"I don't know exactly." Naomasa shrugs on his coat, shaking his head.

“Something about needing clearance into Tartarus.”

“Why would he…?”

“I’ve got no clue, but he seemed pretty dead set on telling me in person.” Naomasa turns towards him again for a moment. “I’ll keep you updated. On everything.”

There’s a lot Toshinori has on his mind, a lot of thoughts racing through his head, but he nods. “Thank you.”

“Anytime,” Naomasa says. “And, Toshinori…” He pauses, back turned to him. “...You can’t blame yourself for what happened to Midoriya. You can’t. In the end, all you’re going to end up doing is hurting you both.”

He leaves before Toshinori can say a word edgewise. The door clicks shut behind him, and Toshinori turns back and stares down at his arms. One of them is in a cast and sling; the other is bandaged. He thinks about One For All, about Midoriya, about the ex-holders.

When Midoriya summoned them all back at the USJ accidentally, they hadn’t been full apparitions. They’d been shapeless voids of black with shining eyes, barely even distinguishable as people, and Midoriya’s condition when he finally released One For All and let them go was life-threatening enough.

But he’d summoned all seven of them again, and this time, they’d been *here.* He’d summoned all of them, fully, completely. He’d pushed One For All as far as it would go, and then some. He’d hurt himself. He’d hurt himself *gravely.*

He wouldn’t have had to do that if Toshinori had been there sooner. *None of this* would’ve happened if Toshinori had been there sooner.

“I’m sorry, Tsukauchi….” When his eyes burn, he does nothing to stop the tears he knows are coming. “...But I’m afraid I can’t help it.”

[Tsuyu-chan-kun]

Iida. I need to talk to you.

Tenya is sitting on his bed that evening, holding his phone between his hands. They’d saved Midoriya, yeah, but victory has never tasted so much like defeat. Midoriya is safe now, and that’s good, but now…

Tenya unlocks his phone and sends his response.

[Iida Tenya]
Sure. Where and when?

[Tsuyu-chan-kun]
Right now. Downtown, maybe.
And, Iida…bring whoever went with you to rescue Midori-chan.

Tenya's heart skips a beat, and his eyes widen.

Tsuyu is waiting for them when they arrive at the plaza. Yaoyorozu, Tenya, Uraraka, Todoroki, and Kirishima stride towards her. The only person who didn't come was Bakugou; he hadn't even answered Tenya's text regarding it when Tenya sent him one earlier.

"Tsuyu," Uraraka says, the first to speak since they arrived, "how...how did you know?"

Tsuyu studies each of their faces for a long moment. "Because I knew how close you all are to Midori-chan," she answers shortly. "I know how much he means to you, and it seemed odd to me that you were all missing that night. It couldn't be coincidental that Midori-chan was rescued the same night you guys were no-show."

"Yeah...you have a point," Kirishima says, biting his lip. He looks at Tenya for a moment, and when Tenya nods, he goes on, "Yeah, we...we did go after Midoriya. We got him out of harm's way while All Might took care of the villain."

Tsuyu nods and looks down at the ground for a long moment. "I was talking with the rest of the class, too," she says. "After we saw what happened on the news, we all got together and talked. Everyone, they…" She stops for a time. "...They're all feeling guilty," she says, looking up at them. "They were all upset that they couldn't do something to help."

"No, it isn't their fault," Uraraka says, shaking her head feverishly, "it isn't, they shouldn't--"

"Ochako." Yaoyorozu reaches over and rests a hand on her shoulder. "Let Tsuyu finish."

Uraraka falls silent, and Tsuyu goes on.

“As for me…” Tsuyu says slowly, “when I first realized what you had done, even before it was on the news...I was angry. I was angry that you were so reckless. I was angry that you put yourselves in danger so carelessly, even if it *was* to save Midori-chan. At least, I did, until...until I saw the report on the news, about Midori-chan’s condition, and...”

She stops again, takes a shuddering breath.

“...And then, I was disgusted with myself. Everyone else, when we saw the news, they regretted not going. They regretted not being there to help the heroes some way, not being there to help *you guys,* and while they all talked, I was...I was so *disgusted.* Because I knew what you were doing. I knew you went to save Midori-chan and I did *nothing.* And now, now he’s in the hospital. Now he’s hurt and the doctors don’t know if he’ll be okay. He needed us, and I stayed behind and *watched.”*

“Asui-san—” Todoroki reaches a hand towards her hesitantly.

“So please.” Tsuyu’s voice breaks, and the tears fall. It’s the first time Tenya, or anyone for that matter, has seen her cry. “Please, forgive me. I’m sorry. I’m sorry, I’m *so sorry.* I was a bad friend, I-I was *horrible,* I didn’t even *try—”*

Uraraka is the first to react, leaping forward and putting her arms around Tsuyu’s shoulders tightly. “D-Don’t cry,” she pleads, “don’t cry, please, Tsuyu. If you cry, th-then—then I-I’m not going to be able to —” She breaks off, and the tears spill over. “O-Oh, w-who am I kidding, *who am I k-kidding—”*

Yaoyorozu moves next, stepping forward and wrapping her arms around the two of them as they sob. Tenya wants to do something, wants to say something, but he can’t find the words. He’s at a loss once again. So much for being the head of the class.

Kirishima settles a hand on Tsuyu’s shoulder. “It’ll be okay,” he says, but he says it like he’s trying to convince himself. “It’ll be okay, y’know? Hey, I’ve got an idea, we can all make cards and stuff to bring to the hospital. All of us, all twenty of us. We’ll make a ton of cards, and Midoriya can read them when he wakes up.”

When.

It’s a very deliberate choice of word, “when.” It gives Tenya and the others something of an anchor to hold onto. Something to look

forward to.

A future to hope for.

Flicker.

White. Seven figures.

Flicker.

Black. Darkness. Unfamiliar voices.

Flicker.

“You have to keep moving, kiddo!”

Flicker.

Seven figures. Facing away from him.

Black. Frantic. Movement.

Flicker.

“Stay alive.”

Flicker.

Seven figures. Facing him.

Flicker.

“Is that really worth your own life, Midoriya?”

Flicker.

Black. Fear. Pain.

Flicker.

“We’ll all be together again soon, I promise.”

Flicker.

One figure. So far away.

Flicker.

Fear.

Flicker.

“You’ve been fighting for so long.”

Flicker.

Seven figures. Then one. Out of reach.

Flicker.

“Let go.”

Flicker.

Nothing.

Kansei opens his eyes.

He doesn’t recognize his surroundings. A white landscape of nothing, with no distinguishable walls or floors or ceilings. He feels like he should know where he is; the place feels familiar in ways he can’t put his finger on.

He supposes the thing that startles him the most is he can actually *see* his surroundings. When he looks down at his hands, he sees them, too. Last he checked, he’d been completely blind. Ever since fighting and nearly losing his life to All Might the first time…

“Nii-san.”

Kansei raises his head. Across from him, standing in a space that’d been empty moments before, is Mirai. It’s been a long time since Kansei has actually seen his little brother, but even so, Mirai looks much more peaceful now. Much more calm. He isn’t even slumping like he used to.

“Mirai,” Kansei says, blinking. “…What is this?”

“You’re dying,” Mirai intones, and he says it as easily as he would say *pass the salt.* “Right now, you’re caught in an in between, neither completely dead nor completely alive.”

“Is that so.” It isn’t a question. Kansei doesn’t need answers. “I see.”

Mirai nods slowly. "...You can come home, you know, if you want."

Kansei frowns. "What do you mean?"

"Home." Mirai turns and looks over his shoulder for a moment. Maybe he sees something Kansei doesn't. "You lost, Nii-san. You lost to All Might, to us, to Midoriya Izuku, and...it's time you gave up."

Kansei stares at his brother for a long, long moment.

"...Give up, you say." He chuckles softly. Mirai's face doesn't change. "Mirai. I will *never* give up. As long as One For All still exists, I cannot rest."

"It's over," Mirai says, taking a step towards him. "Nii-san, it's *over.* You lost. We aren't tethered to your control anymore, none of us. One For All will live on regardless of whether or not you 'give up,' so please."

"I will not." Kansei looks around them, at the white landscape. "I will not rest, Mirai."

"You have nothing here," Mirai says, shaking his head. "There's nothing *for you here,* Kansei, please. Come home. Don't do this."

"It is my own choice, Mirai."

"You'd rather sit here in spite and pout over your loss than rest your spirit and move on," Mirai says flatly. "Nii-san—"

"Don't call me that anymore. I know that isn't how you see me."

"It is." Mirai doesn't look away. Kansei inherited their father's green eyes, but Mirai always had their mother's blue ones, and there's something very piercing, very *searching* about Mirai's gaze. "You will always be my brother, Kansei, just like I will always be yours."

"Regardless, nothing you say or do can persuade me to go forward." Kansei doesn't falter, in resolve or voice. "Playing the family card will get you nowhere. I have my convictions, just like you had yours."

"Please." Mirai's voice cracks. "I'm asking you to accept that you've lost. There's nothing you can do now. Your body is broken, you aren't even there enough to call you 'alive.' The fact that we're both here says that much. There is no returning, there is no revenge. All you'll do here is drown in your own hatred and spite."

“Then drown I will.” Mirai steps back, flinching as though he’d been burned. “I will wait here until I see One For All’s end,” Kansei says. “Until hope is destroyed.”

Mirai is shaking his head before Kansei finishes speaking. “Then you’re going to be here for the rest of eternity,” he says, “because hope lives on in the hearts of *people,* not in One For All.”

“You underestimate my patience. I can wait.”

Mirai opens his mouth and reaches out, but stops at the last moment. He lowers his hand slowly, letting it sway at his side.

“...I will not fight you a third time,” Mirai says, lifting his head. “If you’ve made your decision, I won’t try and dissuade you further. Nii-san...I’ve made my peace. After all these years, after so very long...I’ve finally found my peace. I only hope that, someday, you can find yours.”

When Kansei raises his head to meet his brother’s eyes, Mirai is gone.

Chapter End Notes

HERE WE GO

I'm gonna try and update this again soon, but I'm kiiinnddaaa in a tough situation rn. There's a major fire kinda close to where I'm at and a ton of power lines got damaged, so unless I'm in a hotel/ likewise, I'm not gonna have access to the internet or even have like power to charge my laptop.

So that's fun.

Just wanted to let you guys know since I'll be pretty MIA for a while. I was going to respond to all the comments last time around but then. The whole power thing happened. And now it's all I can do to just post this chapter. I'll try to reply to everything as soon as I'm able! Thanks for all your support you guys!! I love you all!! :D

Until next time, go beyond! PLUS ULTRA!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Edit: Yes I am a manga reader, catch me trippin' out in the club XD

[X X]

Chapter Notes

Some art before we begin!!

icanceledart

ItsBy(M)e

chiangyorange

Thank you all so much, and I hope you enjoy the chapter!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tartarus is almost on complete lockdown, and thereby, nearly impossible to visit. Shouta doesn't know who in their right mind would want to visit Tartarus anyway, but here they are. Him, and Bakugou.

"You may or may not actually be able to get in regardless of what Naomasa says," Shouta tells him. They're waiting outside the police station, where they've been for a while now awaiting the detective's arrival. "Everyone's on edge right now, especially the police."

"I get it." Bakugou's behavior here is odd. Almost wrong. "I still want to try."

Shouta doesn't question it, and he doesn't bring up the rescue mission, either, although it's definitely something that's been on his mind for a while now. There'll be time to reprimand Bakugou and the others involved in that later, but now isn't the time. Once they're sure Midoriya is alright, once he finally *wakes up,* then they'll talk about it.

Until then—

"Aizawa!"

Shouta and Bakugou raise their heads. Naomasa strides towards them hastily, waving a hand over his head to get their attention.

"Naomasa," Shouta greets stiffly, turning towards him. "I appreciate you coming here on short notice."

"Don't mention it," Naomasa says. There's something about his

demeanor that spells *exhausted* in bold print. His eyes flicker over to Bakugou briefly, then meet Shouta's once again. "What's this about?"

"I want to see one of the villains in Tartarus," Bakugou says before Shouta can speak for him. "I know there's a lockdown, but I have something I wanna ask him and it can't wait."

Naomasa looks to Shouta again, question written plain on his face, and Shouta shrugs. "I don't know what he wants," Shouta says, putting up his hands, "and he won't tell me no matter how many times I ask. Says he wants to do it in person."

Naomasa turns to Bakugou again. "You were part of the team that went after Midoriya."

Something flickers in Bakugou's eyes, but he nods. "Yeah."

Naomasa bites his lip for a long moment, torn. Shouta almost doesn't know why he's considering it; Bakugou is a child, and in this situation, things are about as dire as they can get. All For One's condition is deteriorating, but still. Any risk, no matter how small, is to be avoided at all cost.

Except, on the other hand, Shouta *does* know why Naomasa is considering it. Naomasa doesn't know Midoriya and Bakugou's situation like Shouta does (except, in light of recent events, *Shouta* doesn't even know what's going on between them), but what he *does* know is that Bakugou risked his life to save Midoriya from these villains.

So.

"If you'll let me escort you and oversee the conversation with Aizawa," Naomasa says after another long moment has passed, "then the answer is yes. You can have a few minutes with one of the villains."

Bakugou's face doesn't change. He doesn't even seem relieved. "Thanks."

Naomasa meets Shouta's eyes for a moment, saying nothing, and shortly thereafter they take a police car to their destination.

Shouta has always thought Tartarus looked just like something out of a sci-fi movie. With prisons with a glass front wall, secured with

cameras, Quirk suppressing darts and tranquilizers, not to mention its underground location, Tartarus is the most secure prison in Japan. Possibly in the *world.*

It's impossible to say exactly what's going through Bakugou's head as he walks between Naomasa and Shouta heading down the hallway. Shouta usually has an easy time telling what the kid's thinking, but he's never seen this kind of look on Bakugou's face before. He's never seen Bakugou look so set back and reserved, and there's something almost unnerving about it.

"There's one villain who regained consciousness yesterday," Naomasa says; he tips his hat at a pair of guards and keeps walking. "The rest of them are down for the count."

"Which villain?" Bakugou asks.

"The one calling himself 'Muscular,'" Naomasa answers. "He's been talking his guards' ears off, spewing nonsensical babble."

"Sounds pleasant," Shouta intones.

Naomasa just shakes his head. "Right down here," he says, raising a hand and pointing. "Follow me."

The guards let them pass, and they stop in front of Muscular's cell. The villain is quiet now, bound in something akin to a straight jacket. There're half a dozen security cameras and laser pointers aiming at the villain on either wall, watching his every move and ready to fire a tranquilizer should need be.

"You have a visitor," Naomasa says blandly, standing back. Shouta does the same while Bakugou does the opposite, stepping towards the villain.

Muscular has one eye bandaged. The other is a prosthetic. "Well what do you know," he says, grinning. "It's the Bakugou kid. Guess those losers in the League didn't end up nabbing you in the end, did they?"

Shouta has half a mind to intervene, but doesn't. If there's one thing Bakugou has proved beyond a shadow of a doubt, it's that he can handle himself. Besides, it'd be best for him to leave it to Naomasa should there actually be a need to intervene.

"I wanna know," Bakugou says, cutting right to the chase. "Why did the League target me back at the training camp? What did they want

with me and De—Midoriya?"

"Oh, you wanna know, huh?" Muscular's chains rattle, and he shifts forward. The cameras and lasers follow the movement. "I dunno about that Midoriya kid, but Shigaraki was pretty dead set on converting you to villainy."

Bakugou's back is to them, so Shouta can't see his face, but he sees him stiffen. "They what?"

"You, a villain." The chains rattle again, and Muscular's grin widens. "What, don't tell me you're surprised. They thought you'd make a great villain from the start, ever since that Sports Festival came and went. They've had their eye on you for a *long time."*

There's something growing in the air, a tension. As Shouta opens his mouth to break it, Naomasa steps forward. "Alright, that's enough," he says, settling a hand on Bakugou's shoulder. Bakugou *flinches.* "It's time to go."

It hasn't even been two minutes yet, but Bakugou doesn't object. He turns away with Naomasa, and Shouta brings up the rear as they retreat.

"Keep it in mind, why don't you?" Muscular calls after them, and Shouta has half a mind to find some way to get in that cell and punch him in the jaw. "If ya ever wanna be in a place where you can really be who you are, you should become a villain!"

"Shut up," Bakugu hisses, but it's quiet enough that Shouta can barely hear. They continue down the hall from whence they'd come, and Muscular's voice fades as the distance between them grows.

"I'll let you two go," Naomasa says, hanging back. "Let me know if you need anything else, Shouta."

"I will," Shouta says, nodding. "Thanks."

Naomasa shakes his head, smiles in a way that looks more like a wince, then turns away. Shouta and Bakugou press on.

"Don't take his words to heart," Shouta says when the silence stretches. "He's a villain behind bars, his words don't mean—"

"They thought I'd make a good villain."

Shouto turns to him, then sighs. “You’re a lot of things, Bakugou,” he says, “but a *villain* isn’t one of them.”

“No.” Bakugou stops and turns to face him, teeth bared. “They saw me, and thought I’d make a better villain than I would a hero.”

Shouta doesn’t know how to respond, and either way, Bakugou had already stormed away before he has the chance to.

Shouto’s phone rings that afternoon, and the caller ID comes up as *“Midoriya.”*

He whips his phone out and answers it without thinking, heart pounding. “Yes?”

“Shouto?”

His heart drops. Not Midoriya. “Hello, Inko-san.”

“Sorry for calling unexpectedly,” Inko says, her voice small, *“and….and I’m sorry for using Izuku’s phone. I didn’t know how else to contact you.”*

“Wait.” Shouto’s stomach leaps into his throat, and dread begins to find its way to his chest once more. “What’s wrong? What is it? Is Midoriya—”

“Nono, he’s okay,” Inko says quickly, *“he’s okay. Still…still the same, but…he’s okay.”* Shouto breathes a long, heaving sigh of relief. He feels lightheaded. *“I wanted to tell you, he’s accepting visitors now. The doctor just told me. So…if you and Izuku’s friends want to come and visit him…you could.”*

“Really?” Shouto’s hopes rise, just a tad. It’s more than they’ve risen in days. “We can see him now? We can? The doctor said it’s okay?”

“Yes, yes, you can come see him. All of you.”

Shouto thanks her, then hangs up and opens his messenger. His feet are already carrying him towards the train station.

Ochako’s parents are here. They’d arrived unannounced to her apartment, then hugged her tight and didn’t let go for a long time. She’d held back her tears for their sake; she didn’t want them to see her cry so soon after they got here.

“Thanks for coming,” Ochako says, setting a tray of teacups on the coffee table. “I, it…it really means a lot to me to have you here.”

Mom nods. “Of course,” she says, patting the spot beside her. Ochako moves and sits next to her on the threadbare couch. “I’m sorry we couldn’t get here sooner.”

“Damn weather conditions,” Dad grumbles, shaking his head. “A storm rolled in outta nowhere, pushed back the flight a lot.”

Ochako remembers the spirits, two of them in particular, bringing down rains from the clouds onto All For One’s head. She doesn’t say this, though.

“I’m glad you’re here now,” she says instead, leaning over to rest her head on Dad’s shoulder. “Thank you.”

They wrap their arms around her again in a secure embrace, one that she returns.

In her pocket, her phone blares.

“Oh, I-I’m sorry.” She lets go and fumbles around, fishing the device from her back pocket. “I thought I’d turned it off…”

“It’s okay,” Mom says, smiling gently. “Don’t worry about it.”

Ochako is about to silence the phone regardless, but then she actually takes a look at the new message on her phone. Her eyes blow wide, and the hand holding the phone trembles.

[CHATROOM: “INSERT CLEVER TITLE HERE”]

[Thermostat]
Just got a call from Inko. We can go see Midoriya in the hospital now.

Ochako’s ears are ringing, and she clutches the phone tighter, something stirring in her chest and stomach.

“Ochako?” Dad touches her shoulder softly, worried. “Are you alright?”

“It’s, it’s from one of my classmates,” Ochako says, already getting to her feet. “He says—he says Deku can have visitors now. He said we can go see him.”

Her parents exchange a look, then jump to their feet with her. “We’ll go with you,” Mom says, taking Ochako’s hand. Ochako squeezes her fingers back with a fragile smile, although her chest feels fit to burst with excitement.

She and her parents head out shortly thereafter, making for the train station.

[CHATROOM: “CLASS 1-A ANNOUNCEMENTS”]

[Iida Tenya]
I received a text from Todoroki. We can visit Midoriya in the hospital.

[Kaminari]
WAIT REALLY

[Ashido]
Oh thank goodness!! I’m gonna go get him some flowers on my way over!

[Hagakure]
I’ll go with you!

[Sero]
Thanks for the heads-up, class rep! We’ll all be there soon

[Iida Tenya]
Best not all come at once. We can’t all see him at the same time, and we don’t want to overwhelm the doctors or the other patients.

[Satou]
So we’ll go in waves! Five at a time maybe? Or is that too many?

[Kirishima]
Four at a time is probably better, right?

[Iida Tenya]
Yes, that would be best.

[Tsuyu-chan-kun]

Should we all meet you at the hospital?

[Iida Tenya]
Yes please, if you would. We can discuss which groups go in first when everyone arrives.

Class 1-A visits in waves. They bring cards. They bring flowers. Ashido, Hagakure, and Jirou put together a card and had everyone sign it; Sero, Satou, and Kaminari have the same idea and do the same thing, except their card isn't nearly as fancy as the girls' card. Kirishima makes his own card. So do Iida, Uraraka, and Todoroki. Aoyama's card has no lettering, but is rather completely made up of stickers, sparkles and glitter. Yaoyorozu, Ashido, and Hagakure bring a vase full of flowers—cedars, white periwinkles, blue salvias, snowdrops—and they give the others an inkling to do the same.

Aizawa drops by and leaves a simple card. Naomasa brings one from Toshinori, then a second on behalf of the police force. Even a couple pro heroes come and go. Two little kids bring in a small basket of tiny notes cut in heart-shapes.

It's both the least they can do, and everything they can do. All that's left afterwards for them is to wait.

Toshinori has memorized the number of knots in the ceiling of his hospital room. Anything to occupy himself from the lingering thoughts of Midoriya helps immensely. The more he thinks about the kid, the more he thinks about the kind of pain the boy had gone through to turn his hair almost *entirely white,* makes his heart ache in ways he hadn't known possible.

The door of his room opens, and in walks Naomasa. Toshinori sits straighter as the door clicks behind the detective, and Naomasa lets out a long sigh before raising his head to Toshinori with a small, wince-like smile.

"What is it?" Toshinori asks, because although Naomasa is a close friend of his, there's always a reason for his visits. Besides, he'd promised to keep Toshinori updated on Midoriya's situation. "How's Midoriya?"

"He's...more or less the same," Naomasa answers, shaking his head slowly. "He's having visitors now, though. All his friends came by earlier and left cards and flowers for him whenever he wakes up."

Something in Toshinori's chest spikes. "Does that mean—"

"No, you can't see him yet," Naomasa interrupts sharply, looking Toshinori in the eyes. "I know you want to, believe me I do, but you have to let the doctors finish taking care of *you* before you can go visit him."

"I'm *fine—"*

"No, you're not. Not yet." Naomasa heaves a long sigh and hangs his head. "I know you hate it, and you have every reason to, but you need to be patient. Please."

Toshinori wants to argue again, but he can't. Any argument he has now is completely invalid. "Alright," he says finally, though Naomasa was right, he *does* hate it. "Alright, I'll do my best."

"Thanks." Naomasa crosses the room, taking a seat by the bedside again and folding his hands loosely. "I *did* hear that the doctors only have one more major test they wanna do tonight. After that, if they give you the all-clear, there's no reason why you can't go see Midoriya."

Toshinori's head snaps up. "Really?" he asks, hardly daring to hope.

"After the test," Naomasa says pointedly, "and *after* the doctors give you the all-clear. You only have to wait a little while longer, so just hang in there, alright?"

It's better than a simple "you can't visit Midoriya," so Toshinori takes it and nods. "Alright, I will."

Now that he has hope, something to look forward to, "hanging in there" is going to be a much easier thing to do.

Midoriya's room has been decorated. There are flowers in vases on the side table, along with stacks of card, and the curtains are open to let in the sunlight, which bathes the room in a warm, comforting glow.

The simple yet endearing redecoration of Midoriya's room kind of makes Shouto want to smile, and he's sure he would, if Midoriya wasn't in the hospital to begin with.

"I thought we'd light up the room some," Inko says softly, though her eyes are full of pain. She's seated on a chair by Midoriya's bed, and

Shouto sits next to her on an identical chair. “At least then, when he wakes up, he’ll have something nice to look at. I…” She stops a moment, shakes her head. “I wasn’t expecting so many people to make cards for him. You and the rest of his class…you all really care about Izuku a lot, don’t you?”

“Yes,” Shouto says. He doesn’t have to think about it. “Yeah, we—we do. A lot.”

It’s hard, seeing Midoriya like this. Even harder than it’d been before, when he was recovering following the incident with the Hero Killer. At least back then, Midoriya had been conscious during their visits. Now, he isn’t. His eyes are closed, his cheeks are flushed an unhealthy, feverish red, his hair almost completely white, and the machines around him beep and hum. Shouto kind of wants to bury his head in the ground and scream, but refrains. Screaming hadn’t solved anything back at camp, and it certainly won’t solve anything now.

“Where’s Howler?” Shouto asks, just to get the conversation on something else. “It’s weird not seeing him with you…”

“Oh, he’s alright,” Inko says quickly, equally eager to change the subject. “I left him home today. I still have to ask the doctor what their policy is when it comes to things like this, but either way…I can’t imagine them letting him in until Izuku wakes up.”

There’s that “waking up” thing again. By the time this is over, Shouto knows he’ll hate the words.

“…Thank you, Shouto.”

Shouto freezes, but Inko doesn’t.

“Thank you for being such a wonderful friend to Izuku,” she says thickly. “When your classmates visited earlier, at first I wasn’t sure, but…you all…you care about Izuku so *much,* and…and that means more to me—it means more to *Izuku* than words could ever describe. So…thank you. And thank you for not giving up on him, e-even…” She drags in a long, shuddering breath. “E-Even now.”

“Of course,” Shouto says plainly, without having to think about it. “Midoriya is my best friend. I’d never give up on him.”

The words bounce back at him a couple times. He lets them sink in, deep into his heart to stay.

"...Inko-san...have you slept recently?"

"I'm fine," Inko says, which isn't an answer, and she shakes her head. "I'm fine, dear, don't worry about me. I'll sleep, once...once Izuku wakes up."

Shouto takes in a long breath. "Inko-san, I...I know you're worried about him. We all are. But...I think, if he knew you weren't looking after yourself...I think it'd make him really sad. So, please."

Inko opens her mouth as though to argue, but says nothing. She turns away and lets out a long, exhausted sigh, shoulders slumping.

"Alright," she says, "I'll...I'll go home tonight. I have to drop home anyway to take care of Howler."

"I can look after him until you get there," Shouto says, already rising to his feet. As much as he hates leaving Midoriya, sitting here and seeing his friend in such a critical condition is almost worse. "There's...there's a chance I might take up your offer, about using your guest bedroom."

"Oh, of course." Inko doesn't ask for an explanation, just nods. "You can stay with us as long as you like, Shouto."

"Thank you."

Nothing more is said between them, and Shouto departs and heads for the Midoriyas residence. His father's temper has been as short as a candlewick lately, and considering everything else, Shouto has no mental or emotional tolerance for that right now.

He usually tucks the Midoriyas' spare house key into his shirt, and the cord is thin enough to not show through the fabric. Now, he pulls out the key and squeezes it lightly, just to have something to hold on to.

Howler perks up when Shouto steps into the apartment.

Shouto flicks on the lights, and Howler races forward and bounces around him for a moment as he steps into the building. Shouto pulls the door shut behind him, slips off his shoes, and scratches Howler's head as he moves further into the apartment.

It's quiet. Howler's tingling name tags and Shouto's muffled footsteps are all that is to be heard through the apartment, and it seems

improper for it to be so quiet. It seems improper for it to be so *empty*.

Howler bumps Shouto's hand with his nose, and Shouto strokes the dog's head for a long moment.

"...You hungry, Howler?"

Howler lowers his head.

"...Yeah, me neither."

He heads down the hall to the spare room, and Howler follows closely. As Shouto walks, flicking on lights in the hallway, he sees picture frames that he'd failed to notice the first time he was here. There's a picture of Midoriya and Inko when they were both younger; Midoriya couldn't have been older than seven when this was taken, and he's sitting on Inko's shoulders, holding onto the string of a kite.

There are other pictures, too. Old ones, ones taken years ago, and then a recent one of Midoriya and Howler. Midoriya is kneeling in the grass and holding a peace sign up to the camera, his other arm around Howler's neck, and Howler is actually looking at the camera, tongue lolling out the side of his mouth.

Shouto can't help but smile, though it ends quickly, and he moves on.

The spare bedroom Inko offered to him is small but homey, like the rest of the apartment. There's a bed, an empty closet, a bedside table...it's simple, but endearing, and the fact that the Midoriyas offered this to him out of the good of their hearts makes the endearment that much more.

Shouto falls face down onto the bed, the key Midoriya gave him pressing into his chest. A weight dips the mattress, and Howler curls against Shouto's side, warm, real. Shouto's eyes burn.

He thought he was done crying.

He'd never been more wrong.

When Inko gets home that night, Howler is turning the lights off.

She walks in on him as he's leaping and bopping the lightswitch with his nose. His ears perk up when he hears her come in, and he stares at her for a long moment while she stares back.

And then, satisfied with his work, Howler turns and bolts back down the hall. After a moment or two of stunned silence, Inko follows him.

Howler leads her to the guest bedroom, and he disappears inside just as she turns the corner to start down the hall. The door is cracked open, not by much, but just enough for Howler to squeeze through unhindered. Inko pauses outside the door for a moment, then pushes it open and peers inside.

Howler is already curled up on the bed beside Shouto, who is laying on his front, unmoving, with a blanket dragged poorly over him (Howler's doing, no doubt).

Inko steps into the room slowly as to not disturb him, and Howler settles down noiselessly, as though thinking the same thing. Inko reaches for the corners of the blanket to pull it more securely around Shouto's shoulders, and then—

That's when she notices the remnants of tears on Shouto's face. It hits her, and it hits her *hard.*

After a moment of hesitation, she takes the blanket again and spreads it over him further, being careful not to wake him. Shouto doesn't stir, and after another moment in which she wars with herself, she presses a kiss to his forehead, then spins on her heel and leaves the room.

She doesn't think she'll be able to sleep tonight, but for Izuku's sake, and for Shouto's now as well, she decides it's worth giving a shot.

The doctor gives Toshinori the clear later that night. After one final examination, one last checkup, Toshinori is finally allowed to see Midoriya for the first time since rescuing him.

"Visiting hours are technically over," the doctor is saying as he leads Toshinori down the hallway; there are no nurses to be seen, and the quiet atmosphere puts Toshinori further on edge, "but, considering you're listed as one of his emergency contacts, and how worried you've been about him, I can give you a few minutes."

Toshinori nods fervently. "Thank you," he says, and he hopes these next couple minutes are the longest of his life. "I appreciate this more than you realize. *Thank you."*

The doctor chuckles softly, shaking his head. The laughter sounds almost broken. "Well," he says, turning towards the door with a

nameplate beside reading *Midoriya Izuku,* "enjoy your time. I'll let you know when you have to go."

He opens the door, and Toshinori hesitantly steps inside. The room is dark, but the windows are open, allowing moonlight to shine through. Toshinori feels like he's been warped back in time to the Hero Killer incident, but there are a few things that are different. For one, the room is decorated. Toshinori can see cards and flower vases all along the side table, and a majority of the cards are taped to the wall beside the hospital bed. And, secondly, Izuku's hair is... *white.*

When Toshinori gets closer, he sees a bit of remaining green. There's still a good three inches of it, along the ends of Izuku's hair, but that's the only exception to his otherwise white locks. Toshinori had noticed this before, when he first arrived at the scene, but he'd been too preoccupied with All For One to really give it much thought.

Now is different. Now he has all the time in the world, and now it *hurts.*

He sinks into the chair beside the hospital bed and reaches out hesitantly, placing his hand on Izuku's forearm. His skin is *burning.*

"Kiddo…"

Toshinori shuts his eyes and grits his teeth behind his lips, squeezing Izuku's forearm gently.

"Please," he murmurs, voice getting stuck in his throat more than once. "Please, kiddo. Please. Wake up."

Izuku doesn't. He remains still and motionless, no matter how many times Toshinori pleads with him.

"Please, kiddo. Please. Wake up."

Izuku opens his eyes.

He's back in the white landscape of nothingness, stretching as far as the eye can see on all sides, with no distinguishable walls or floor or ceiling. This place is so familiar to him now, although he still isn't completely sure what it actually is.

Standing across from him, one of the first thing he sees in the white, are the ex-holders. They're facing him, closer than ever before, and

they're *smiling.*

He takes one step towards them. Then a second step. A third. A fourth. His feet move faster, until he's jogging, then running, then sprinting.

It's Nana who meets him first, opening her arms and embracing him tightly when he dives into them. Tears burn his eyes, even more so when he feels Dai's hand on his arm, Aki's hand on his shoulder, Yukō's hand in his hair, Kibō's and Senshi's and Mirai's on his back, but he's smiling. He's smiling and his face actually aches with it.

They let him go, and he releases them too and steps back, taking in a deep breath. When he thinks about it, he looks down at his hands; he sees his feet through them, and faint scars litter his palms and forearms.

"So…" Izuku raises his head again slowly to meet the ex-holders' eyes. "I...I guess I'm not in the best shape right now, am I?"

Their winces say it all, and they look down uncomfortably for a moment.

"Not exactly," Aki admits, rubbing the back of his neck. "You're in kind of an…'in between,' I guess. Somewhere caught in the middle of dead and alive."

Izuku blinks. "...Oh." A pause.. "...So the usual."

Senshi rolls her eyes with a snort, then reaches out and ruffles his hair. "Nah, not this time," she says warmly. "This time's a little different."

"You've always kinda had a closer connection with death, haven't you?" Dai looks uncomfortable, but his voice is steady. "It's why you're able to summon us through One For All. It's why you're able to summon us, spirits that haven't, y'know...actually *passed on* yet."

Izuku takes this in slowly. It's hard to compute. "So...this, 'middle' ground between life and death…" He's almost afraid to ask. "What...what does that mean for me?"

"It means that it's your choice," Nana answers at once, and Izuku looks to her. "Whether you wanna pass on or keep living...it's up to you now, kiddo.. Except..." At this, she smiles softly and raises her head to look at something over Izuku's shoulder. "...I think I already know which one you're gonna choose."

Izuku follows her gaze behind him. Farther away, barely visible across the landscape, is another figure. One Izuku recognizes.

When Izuku turns back towards the ex-holders, he's smiling. "I can't die now," he says, shaking his head. "There are too many people waiting for me to come back. I can't let them down."

"I'm glad." Yukō reaches out and tousles Izuku's hair fondly. "It ain't your time yet, anyway. You've got a looong way to go."

"Just keep that in mind the next time you do something stupid," Dai advises, but he's smiling. "Don't die before your time comes, alright? It's not a race."

"I know." Izuku smiles faintly again, but it almost hurts this time. "Dai, I...thanks. For helping fight off the Hero Killer. I don't think I ever actually thanked you for that."

"You don't have to." Dai's smile grows, and it lights up his eyes. "If I was doing it for the sake of gratitude, then a hero wouldn't be my choice of occupation."

Izuku exhales sharply through his nose and shakes his head, his smile fading slowly. In the face of these people, standing here in this "in between," after witnessing their deaths one after the other...he finally has the chance to reflect.

He looks to Nana first, remembers her regret and desperation as she died. He looks to Senshi next, remembers her loneliness, but her belief in her successor to carry on without her. He looks at Dai, at Aki, friends whose time together was cut short by All For One, by a villain who wouldn't let up, who taunted them. Kibō's pain as she died, Aki's pain as he watched; Yukō's despair as he, for a time, forgot himself. Despair as he contemplated giving up.

And then there's Mirai, All For One's brother, and Izuku can actually see his face properly for the very first time. He has soft blue eyes, weary, but there's something there. Something solid. A determination, perhaps. Hope.

They're scarred, all of them. Scarred by psychological things. Scarred by emotional pain and heartbreak. Scarred by despair and pain and hurt and loss.

Izuku turns his head away and looks down at his shoes for a long while.

"...T-Tell me something."

He feels their eyes bearing into him, and eventually, he lifts his head to meet them.

"...Now that All For One is gone...now that he's been beat...now that he can't hurt you, or hurt anyone you care about ever again…" He drags in a long breath, and his vision blurs. "...Can you...will you...c-can you rest peacefully now?"

There's a beat.

"Yes," Kibō says at long last. "Now that All For One is gone...now that his reign of terror has finally been put to an end...I have peace."

"Yeah, me too," Aki agrees, nodding. "Just knowing that he'll never hurt anyone again...knowing that he never *got away* with hurting anyone...I'm satisfied."

"He may be my brother," Mirai says shortly, calmly, "but...I've let him go. The Kansei I knew died with the name 'All For One,' and now, the monster who destroyed my brother has been beaten."

"The ache is gone," Nana says, looking to the others. "All For One's reign is finally over, and...he took with him my spite and my hatred towards him. Knowing that he's gone…"

"Yeah." Yukō nods firmly. "I'm content."

"It's hard to believe he's actually gone for good," Senshi says, "but I know he is. I don't think I've ever felt this *free* in a long, long time."

Izuku can't help it. He smiles as the tears burn his eyes, and he know that once they start, there'll be no stopping them. "I'm glad," he strains, and he reaches to wipe at his eyes with his knuckles. "I'm...I'm *so happy for you all."*

They smile at them, all of them.

"It's because of you, y'know," Dai says, and he steps forward. "I'll be honest with you, when we talked and you said you were gonna end All For One, before you even knew who the heck you were talking about, I had my doubts. I shouldn't've."

"It's okay." Izuku's chest is so light and he feels so floaty that if he was in his own body right now, he's certain his spirit would still be way up

in the stratosphere, celebrating. “It’s okay, Dai, I’m just—I’m just glad—it’s—it’s *over.”*

The word resonates with him. It’s over. Over. Done. All For One is gone and can’t hurt them anymore. The ex-holders have found their peace.

Izuku thinks of something he hadn’t before, and he looks to Nana again. “Nana…what about Shigaraki?” he asks at long last. “What about…what about Tenko? Have you…?”

Nana sucks in a sharp breath, then shakes her head. “I failed him,” she says, “but I can’t go and fix my mistakes. I’ve learned that. Whatever he chooses now…I have no say in it. I’ve never had a say in it. And, when his time comes…I’ll be with him again. The words I want to say, everything I want him to know…I’ll tell him, when the time comes. Just, Izuku, promise me…” She stops for a moment, takes in a breath. “Don’t let him kill you. Please.”

“Okay.” Izuku doesn’t have to think about it, even though he’s sure he’ll have a lot to chew on later. “I promise.”

Nana smiles, and Izuku sees her eyes glisten with tears. “Thanks, kiddo.”

“While we’re on the topic of promises,” Dai says, stepping forward, “Midoriya, you’d better not die until you’ve lived a long, fulfilling life. Promise me.”

“I-I’ll do my best,” Izuku says, smiling faintly. “I promise, I’ll do my best and live.”

They smile at him, Aki, Dai, Kibō, Yukō, Nana, Senshi, and finally, Mirai.

After a moment, Izuku glances over his shoulder again, at Toshinori’s form standing so far away. Something in Izuku’s chest aches, and he turns towards the ex-holders once again, for the last time.

“I should go,” he says, and he’s still smiling now, even as a stray tear makes its way down his face. “I love you guys. All of you. And, I’m—I’m going to miss you, but…”

“Yeah.” Yukō nods and smiles at him. “You’ve got people waiting for you, boyo. Don’t keep ‘em any longer.”

“I feel rather terrible, leaving you like this when you’re in the hospital,” Kibō says softly, and her eyes are hurt. “We should—”

“No, no, I—I want you to go,” Izuku says, and the words leave a bitter taste in his mouth and an ache in his chest. “If you’re ready to move on...now that you *can*... then, please. I want you to go.”

They look at each other for a moment, then turn back to him. Kibō nods, and the others follow her example—except for Dai, who’s hand snaps to his temple in a cheesy salute instead.

“When your time comes,” Nana says, and Izuku can see her eyes shimmering, too, “when you and Toshi join us...we’ll be waiting. But there’s no hurry. I hope that day doesn’t come for a long, long time.”

“It better not,” Kibō agrees, nodding. “You’ve got a whole life ahead of you, sweetheart. Now it’s time for you to go enjoy it.”

The tears fall more freely, and before he can stop himself, Izuku lunges at them.

They hug him fiercely, and he hugs them back tighter than ever. One last time.

And then, he sees something. As their arms go around him tightly and he shuts his eyes, tears streaming freely down his face, he sees something.

He sees a young Mirai and Kansei, sitting on a rooftop looking up at the sky. They’re both smiling, and Kansei has a hand raised upwards, reaching for the stars.

“Things’ll be different someday, Mirai,” he says, a promise. “I swear to you, someday, things’ll be better.”

Mirai smiles and nods.

The scene shifts, and a young Yukō is sprinting down a long sidewalk, pursued by two angry men. Yukō’s clothes are in tatters, ugly grays and browns. He opens a canteen he’s got with him, pulls the water from within it, and sends it at the men. It hits and soaks them, but that’s all it does.

“Stop him! Thief!”

Yukō runs faster, and when he’s looking over his shoulder and not at

where he's going, he crashes into someone's legs.

He stares upwards into Mirai's eyes, and Mirai looks down at him for a long moment, then raises his head towards the pursuing men.

They stop, glaring. "This one yours?" one of them snaps, jabbing a finger at Yukō.

Yukō steps backwards, knocking into Mirai's legs again, but Mirai's arm comes around his shoulders tightly.

"Yes. He's mine. I apologize for any trouble he might've caused you."

The man clicks his tongue. "Keep 'im in line next time," he growls angrily. "I won't be so forgivin' the next time this brat tries somethin' smart."

"I'll keep that in mind." Mirai bows lowly, and when he's straightened up again, he's glaring. "Now, if you would leave us in peace, I would greatly appreciate that."

The two men snarl at him, but don't try anything else, and they storm off in the direction from whence they'd come, grumbling and growling the whole way.

Mirai's arm is still around Yukō's shoulders. "Tell me, what's your name?"

"...Yukō. My name's Yukō."

Mirai nods slowly, and he squeezes his shoulder. "No more stealing, alright, Yukō?"

"...Alright."

The scene changes again, and an older Yukō stands in a field. Kibō, no older than nine, watches with fascination as he twirls a rope of water around his wrist.

"That's amazing!" she says, leaping to her feet. "Teach me how to do it, please!"

Yukō chuckles. "Alrighty," he says, bending down, "catch!"

He swings his arm and sends the water at her, and Kibō reaches for it. She twirls her hand, and the water bends to her will and circles it.

“Hey, look!” She’s beaming so brightly it’s in danger of splitting her face. “Looklooklook, Ojisan, I’m doing it—!”

The water makes an abrupt turn and splashes into her face. Kibō sucks in a sharp inhale of breath in shock, and across from her, Yukō laughs.

“OJISAN!” Kibō brushes the water off her face, glaring. “That was mean!”

“Sorry, girly.” But as he says it, he’s still unable to get his laughter under control. “But that look on your face, oh, you should’a *seen it—”*

Water slams unceremoniously into Yukō’s face, and he coughs and splutters, stumbling back. Kibō puts her hands on her hips triumphantly, completely dry once again.

“Now we’re even!” she says proudly.

“Oh yeah?” Yukō crouches, grinning, and water drips down his face. “Bring it on.”

Kibō grins back at him, and they continue this way, laughing and whooping and splashing each other.

A new scene, and an older Kibō is gasping for breath, clutching a wound in her side. There’s a villain in front of her, flames blazing in each hand, and he’s laughing, taunting her, daring her to stand up again.

A boy barrels in out of nowhere and socks the villain in the jaw.

If the villain hadn’t been distracted by Kibō, it wouldn’t have worked, but it does. The villain’s head snaps to the side, and he stumbles backwards; Dai, maybe eleven or twelve years old, gasps for breath and glares at him.

And then, he spins around and looks into Kibō’s eyes.

“Don’t give up!” are the words he shouts, and it fills Kibō with a new sense of something she hadn’t felt for a long, long time, ever since her grandfather passed. She rises to her feet and fights on.

She wins.

As rain pours from the sky and the onlooking crowds cheer, Kibō stands triumphant, and the boy who made it so stands behind her.

"...What is your name?" Kibō asks, turning towards him.

He smiles at her and salutes dorkily. "Daichi, but feel free to call me Dai. Pleasure to meet'cha, Water Horse."

Kibō can't help but smile. "The pleasure is all mine, Dai."

The scene changes, and Dai and Aki, highschoolers, are walking down a long sidewalk. The sun sets behind them, bathing the street in warn light.

"Y'know, I've been thinking."

"Oof. That's dangerous."

Aki sighs. "How long are you gonna be like this, man?"

"As long as you keep calling me dumb names when you're mad at me."

"Well *excuse me,* Carlos."

Dai smiles, but it fades quick. "Look, buddy, I know you're worried about your Quirk," he says, "but I've always thought the wind thing was super awesome!"

"Don't take this the wrong way," Aki says, frowning at him, "but coming from a dude who started off completely Quirkless, that doesn't mean much."

"Oh that's a low blow." Dai punches him lightly on the shoulder, but sighs a second later. "Listen, if you ask me, I think you can be a hero with or without an amazing Quirk. Heck, I was planning on being one *way* before Kibō gave me One For All."

Aki looks away, but something in his eyes has changed. "...Thanks, Dai."

Dai turns to him, wide-eyed.

"What?"

"You called me by my name," Dai says, clutching his chest. "I'm shook. I will remember this moment forever."

"Pft." Aki rolls his eyes, but he's smiling now. "I'm the one who started calling you Dai in the first place. Don't be so dramatic."

Dai grins at him. “You’re right, guess I’ll just leave that part up to you.”

“Steve, I swear.”

Dai cackles, and the scene changes. Senshi is standing in an alleyway, no older than fourteen, and her hands are on fire. There are tears streaming down her face as she sends flame after flame at the approaching villain. He thwarts all of her attacks with a grin, and the two girls behind Senshi are screaming and sobbing, embracing each other.

“I’m not letting you get to them!” Senshi barks, loudly and with authority despite the tears cascading down her cheeks. “You’ll have to kill me first!”

“That won’t be necessary.”

Aki swings in, hood over his head, and a torrent of wind sweeps through the alley. Senshi’s flames go out; the villain isn’t smiling anymore; and Aki rises to his full height and puts an arm out towards Senshi.

“You’ve been brave,” he says, eyes on the villain. “I’ll handle this from here, don’t worry. Just stay behind me, okay?”

Senshi nods shakily.

“Who are you!?” the villain demands, pointing. “What makes you think you have the right to come barrelling in here unannounced?”

“Don’t you know?” Aki grins, pulling off his hood, and he flicks his fingers towards himself in a very *come at me, bro* kind of way. “It’s Free Real Estate.”

A gust of wind slams the villain up against the wall of the alley, and Senshi watches on in awe.

The scene shifts, and an older Senshi and a younger Nana are sparring in a field. Senshi hooks her foot behind Nana’s calf and yanks her feet out from under her; Nana yelps and hits the ground, wincing.

“Hey, you’ve gotten better, kid!” Senshi reaches towards her, and Nana takes her hand and lets her pull her to her feet. “Another round, what do you say?”

Nana swallows hard, rubbing her forearm. “This is the seventh time we’ve done this,” she says quietly. “Are you...are you sure you want —”

Senshi punches her on the forearm, and Nana lets out a short shriek, hands coming to clasp the offended limb.

“Hey, what gives?”

“Don’t you dare ask me whether or not I want you to succeed me,” Senshi says instead of apologizing. “I picked you, didn’t I? You’ve just gotta trust that I know what I’m doing.”

“But you never know what you’re doing.”

Senshi opens her mouth and raises a finger, but says nothing. “...That’s fair,” she says, “but still! You’re worthy of One For All, Nana, more worthy than you realize. I just wish you could see in yourself the same things that I see in you.”

Nana blinks. “And...what exactly is it that you see in me?”

Senshi kneels to her level and tousles her hair affectionately.

“I see a shooting star,” she says, smiling, “just waiting to shine.”

The scene shifts, and a teenage Toshinori is sprinting across a rooftop at night. He skids to a halt and stays still for a long moment, staring. Nana is standing near the edge of the rooftop, looking at the city beyond.

“Sensei? You said you wanted to see me?”

Nana *jumps* and whirls around to face him. “Oh, Toshinori!” she says, smiling, but it looks so fake it hurts. “Oh, yeah, sorry, I was a bit lost in thought there for awhile, I forgot you were coming, so, I’m, yeah, sorry—”

Toshinori frowns at her. “Is...something the matter?”

“Oh, no, um, not really.” Nana shakes her head and waves her hands about. “Just, *y’know,* hero stuff and all that jazz, lotsa stuff going on lemme tell you—”

“Sensei…” Toshinori doesn’t look upset anymore, merely worried. “...What’s wrong? You aren’t normally like this.”

Nana takes in a long breath and lowers her hands. They sway limply at her sides.

"There's...a villain," Nana says slowly, without meeting Toshinori's eyes. "It's hard to say exactly when or where he'll show himself, but there have been a couple startling reports lately, and...I believe the time is coming for me to face him."

Toshinori doesn't miss a beat. "And?"

Nana shakes her head. "Toshinori, it's not—"

"I believe in you," Toshinori says, and the absolute *certainty* in his voice makes Nana pause. "I've always believed in you, always, and that'll never change. And," at this, Toshinori's skin lights up as One For All pours through his veins, and he punches his fist into his open palm with a wide, blinding smile, "No matter what happens, I'm going to be by your side. That'll never change."

Nana blinks at him, twice.

And then, she wraps her arms around his shoulders tightly and doesn't let go. She's smiling, and when she closes her eyes, a tear runs down her cheek.

"Toshinori...you're going to be ten times the hero I ever was."

Toshinori exhales sharply through his nose, drops One For All, and embraces her back. "I've got a long way to go before that happens. A couple of lifetimes, even."

Nana laughs, and the scene fades.

Izuku is back in the white, but this time, the ex-holders are gone. He stares at the empty space for a long moment, before realizing what this means, and when he does, he laughs shortly, even as the tears stream down his face.

When he gets himself under control, he turns and looks at Toshinori's figure again, standing so far out of reach. Far out of reach, but...not *too* far.

Izuku kicks off the ground, running, closing the distance. One foot after the other. One moment after the next. His tears are blown back off his face, and his cheeks hurt with his smile, but he doesn't stop. He runs faster.

Then, Toshinori turns around.

He sees him. Toshinori doesn' t know where he is, what this means, but he sees him. He sees Izuku sprinting towards him across the landscape, *beaming,* and Toshinori is moving before he registers wanting to.

He meets Izuku half-way, and Izuku dives into his arms.

The scene changes.

"You can become a hero."

Izuku sees himself on the ground, sobbing, and he sees Toshinori smiling warmly at him as the sun sets in the distance.

The scene doesn't change this time. It fades to black.

Toshinori jerks awake, sitting up, breathing heavily. One hand is absentmindedly clutching his chest; the other, clutching the railing of the hospital bed. He doesn't know what he's feeling, but he's feeling a very real, very painful *something,* and he remembers what he'd seen with such clarity, remembers Izuku running towards him, and he'd hugged him and it'd all felt so *real*—

"I love you, kiddo."

Toshinori jolts. The voice is familiar, he *knows the voice,* but it comes from within him.

"This is goodbye, for now," Nana says softly, and her voice is faint and getting fainter. *"Remember what I told you before, Toshinori. Even though you can't see me…a part of me will always be with you. Now…go to your kid. He needs you."*

Her voice fades, and Toshinori has a distant feeling of completion. Closure that isn't his.

Realization sinks in, and Toshinori is moving. He doesn't have any medical equipment hooked up anymore, which makes it that much easier. After seeing what he'd just seen, feeling what he'd just felt, hearing Nana's voice, her words, he can't sit still. He feels as though he's being pulled.

He needs to get to Izuku.

There are no doctors and nurses around when he leaves his room and steps into the hallway, so he doesn't have anyone to stop him. He moves, fast and then faster, until his injuries ache and he *almost* wants to stop. Almost, of course, because he doesn't.

It doesn't take long to find the room. The nameplate beside room 103 reads *Midoriya Izuku,* and without waiting, Toshinori throws open the door and tumbles inside.

Izuku's eyes are open. He's staring at the ceiling, smiling, and his tears fall vigorously and seep into the pillow beneath his head.

It takes Izuku another moment to realize he's not alone, and it takes Toshinori an equally long moment to find his bearings again. He moves across the room, and when Izuku meets his eyes, the tears fall harder and faster than before. Than *ever.*

Toshinori sits on the edge of the bed and pulls the boy into his arms, and Izuku hugs him tight and *sobs.* Toshinori has seen the boy cry before, numerous times, but he's never seen him this broken.

"It's okay," Toshinori finds himself saying, and he rests his chin atop Izuku's head and holds him just a little bit tighter. "It's okay, kiddo. It's okay. You're safe now, it's over. It's over." It's *over.* "Just...let it go. Everything you've had bottled up... *let it go.* "

Izuku stills for a moment, but only for a moment. When the tears come back, there are more of them than ever, and Izuku sobs and shakes and Toshinori holds onto him tightly, his own tears falling.

He shifts and leans against the headboard, in it for the long haul, and Izuku curls against him without letting go.

Very faintly, even if it's just in his own head, Izuku thinks he hears their voices, calling to him one last time.

"Thanks for everything, buddy."

Dai.

"Be strong, Izuku. You've got this."

Aki.

“Have a good life, boyo. Don’t go dying anytime soon, ya hear?”

Yukō.

“You did good. I’m so proud of you, sweetheart.”

Kibō.

“We all are, kid. You’ve got a heart of pure gold. You’re gonna go far.”

Senshi.

“Keep moving forward, Midoriya Izuku. You’ll make it through.”

Mirai.

“We love you, kiddo.”

Nana.

“Now, face your future, and keep shining like the shooting star you are.”

Chapter 35: One Last Time

Chapter End Notes

"One Last Time" from Hamilton

"We're gonna teach them how to say goodbye,
To say goodbye,
You and I."

For Forever

Chapter Summary

"For Forever" from Dear Evan Hansen

“All we see is sky, for forever.
We watch the world pass by, for forever.”
Everything’s gonna be alright for forever this way.”

Chapter Notes

Art!!

raven-dreaming WARNING FOR BLOOD/GORE

meower808

good-night-starshine

wailing-whaler

Thank you so much!! Enjoy the chapter! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It doesn’t take long for Izuku to cry himself to sleep, though Toshinori knows, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that this is a natural sleep that Izuku will *most definitely* wake up from, come morning. Toshinori knows the boy’s asleep the moment Izuku goes quiet, nestled in Toshinori’s arms securely, tears still streaking down his cheeks.

He’s smiling, though, ever so faintly, and before long Toshinori finds himself smiling equally faintly, but equally genuinely.

Eventually, when he thinks about it, he settles Izuku onto his bed again, then reaches over and presses the “Call Nurse” button.

It’s hard to say exactly what Shouto is feeling when he wakes up the next morning, but one thing he *doesn’t* feel is refreshed. He slept all through the night, exhausted by previous endeavors, not to mention mental and emotional stress, but now waking up, he’s almost more exhausted than he did before he fell asleep.

He sits up slowly, not bothering to wipe the sleep from his eyes, and

Howler, curled up at the foot of the bed, perks up and looks at him. Shouto waves a tired hand in greeting, then drops his arm back down to his side with a long sigh.

Another day without Midoriya.

He gets to his feet, and Howler hops off the bed to flank him as he makes for the door. He's glad for the dog's company, on one hand, but on the other hand, Howler has always reminded him of Midoriya, and that hurts.

He reaches for the doorknob and tries to put it out of his mind.

The door swings open before he has the chance to touch it, and Inko stands in the doorway, wide-eyed, frantic.

"Shouto," she says, holding out her phone. "I-I got a call from the doctor, Izuku, he—he *woke up."*

They run.

Shouto remembers boarding the bullet train with Inko, vaguely, and after that he remembers running alongside her towards the hospital. He has no thought process; he isn't even excited, no, that word can't describe what he's feeling. What he's feeling goes beyond excitement. What he's feeling goes beyond what he can put into words.

When they arrive at the hospital, Inko is quick to give her name to the receptionist. Inko also makes it very clear that Shouto is going in with her no matter what, to which the receptionist nods, and Shouto is thankful. He's in such a state of unease that he's not sure he'll be able to sit still until he sees Midoriya with his own two eyes.

The receptionist gives them their visitor badges, and Inko and Shouto take off down the hallway toward Midoriya's room. Shouto knows they aren't supposed to run, but right now he can't help it, and he knows Inko can't, either.

They run, and then they reach the room. Inko throws the door open and immediately, the two of them run inside, nearly tripping and tumbling in their haste.

Nearly everything is the same; the cards, the flowers, the equipment. Except, Midoriya is sitting up, eyes open, hands folded loosely in his lap. While he isn't on oxygen anymore, he still has an IV needle in his

wrist, and he looks absolutely exhausted.

But, he turns to them. He turns to them, blinks once, and then he *smiles.*

“Hey, Mom. Thermostat.”

Inko is the first to move, rushing forward, and Shouto falls in her footsteps. The feeling within him is more real now, more *there,* like something in his chest just waiting to burst free. Maybe it’s laughter. Maybe it’s tears. Maybe it’s a combination of both.

Inko hugs Midoriya tightly, sitting on the edge of the bed with him, and Midoriya hugs her back equally so, burying his face in her shoulder. Shouto stands off to the side, not wanting to intrude, but Midoriya snags his wrist and yanks him into it. After that, Shouto wraps his arms tightly around his friend and tries desperately not to cry.

(Except, when he realizes Midoriya and Inko are already crying, this becomes a much harder feat.)

The doctor pulls Inko outside shortly to speak with her. She doesn’t want to leave Midoriya’s side for all the obvious reasons, but the doctor eventually coaxes her to follow him (though not before Inko has the chance to kiss Midoriya on the forehead and promise to return). Now, Midoriya and Shouto are alone; Shouto pulled up a chair, and Midoriya is, of course, still on the hospital bed. The majority of his hair is the same color of the sheets beneath him.

“...I read some of the cards,” Midoriya says quietly, turning to a couple on the bedside table. “I couldn’t get to all of them, yet, but...I read the one the class made for me. It was...it was a nice thing to wake up to.”

Shouto nods, distracted. The situation isn’t awkward or uncomfortable, he just doesn’t know what to say.

“Is Howler okay?” Midoriya asks, turning to him. “Has he been with you or…?”

“He’s at your place,” Shouto answers; one thing he can do is fill Midoriya in on the happenings of late. “We didn’t know if the doctors would let him in to see you, so we left him there for now.”

“Makes sense.” Midoriya nods, but he seems distracted now, too. He takes in a deep breath, and it hitches once or twice. “Todoroki, I-I—”

The door bangs the wall across from them. Midoriya *jumps,* as does Shouto, and they both whirl around to watch Uraraka, Iida, and Kirishima tumble over each other into the room.

Midoriya blinks at them several times while they struggle with their balance, and they finally raise their heads to meet his gaze, wide-eyed and dumbfounded.

Midoriya smiles, and Shouto can see tears gather in his eyes again as he raises a tentative peace sign beside his face and says quietly, “I-I lived, fools.”

The tension breaks, and Kirishima takes the lead in crossing the room and throwing himself onto Midoriya, hugging him tightly. Uraraka and Iida follow in close pursuit; Uraraka is crying, but smiling, and Shouto doesn’t think he’s ever seen Iida look so overjoyed and relieved, though he doesn’t make a big show of it. When Kirishima releases Midoriya and sits back, Uraraka and Iida take his place, and Shouto’s own eyes burn again while he watches.

Midoriya is home now. He’s home, he’s awake, he’s safe. Maybe the future really *does* hold something to look forward to.

“How’re you feeling?” is what everyone wants to say, but only Kirishima seems to have the courage (or the guts) to actually vocalize. He’s sitting on the edge of the bed along with Uraraka; Iida and Shouto sit on chairs beside the bed.

“Oh, I’m alright!” Midoriya says, but he doesn’t back it up with a smile, or even a bad joke like he normally does. “I’m, y’know, I just woke up last night so I’m still trying to process everything, but I’m alright. I saw the cards you guys made for me, that was…” He pauses, and the smallest hint of a smile turns the corners of his mouth. “That was really sweet of you.”

“We’re just glad you’re alright,” Uraraka says with a relieved sigh, and she’s smiling. “We’ve been so worried about you ever since the villains. We’re just glad to have you home, Deku.”

Midoriya *does* smile a bit brighter at this, though it’s gone quickly. “...You guys are too reckless, you know that, don’t you?” he says, lowering his head. “Charging in there like you did, in the middle of

that fight...you all could've been killed."

"You could've been killed as well," Iida says pointedly, and when Midoriya opens his mouth to argue, "We didn't put our lives at stake. We took every precaution we could to ensure our safety as well as yours. I promise you, we didn't go charging in there blindly. We did whatever we could and took every precaution in the situation."

Midoriya doesn't look fully convinced, but he sighs. "I'm glad," he says, voice quiet. "If something had happened to you guys on my account, I...I don't know what I would've done."

"Oh, are you serious?" Kirishima says, and everyone turns to him at once, wide-eyed. "You're seriously worried about us getting hurt on your account? What about every time you've done *literally* just that?" At this, Kirishima rises to his feet and messes up his hair dramatically. It looks terrible. "'Hey'all, I'm Midoriya Izuku, and I'm gonna break my arms at these villains to protect my friends, even if they aren't in danger!'"

He's doing it to lighten the mood, and it works. Midoriya *laughs,* and though it's soft and a broken shell of what it used to be, Shouto can hear the sincerity behind it.

"I've *gotten better,"* he complains, though he's grinning. "Still, though, what about *you* guys? 'Oh,'" he flicks his hair, "'let's go charging in there in the heat of the moment, riding off an ice ramp with enforced boosters, and tell him to jump! That's smart!'"

"We had a plan!" Uraraka argues, though her distress is feigned. She flails her arms about in a mock imitation of Iida and says in a voice much lower and sterner than her own, "It is against the law to engage in direct combat with the villains so we must refrain from that at all cost!"

"It *is* against the law!" Iida protests sharply. "Also, when have I *ever* done that with my hands!?"

"You *just did!"*

Midoriya laughs again. It's a nice thing to hear after everything. "I'll be completely honest with you, though, Iida, being friends with you is sort of like having an overbearing big brother."

Iida *gapes* at him, wide-eyed, and Midoriya dissolves into another fit of hysteric cackling.

"Your *face!"* Midoriya says, seemingly unable to control himself. "Your *face* I can't, I *can't…"*

Iida regains his composure and sighs, straightening his glasses. "I...suppose I'm flattered? Although I'm not entirely sure that was your intention."

"It's a compliment, I promise," Midoriya says breathlessly, waving a hand once he's gotten himself under control. "Good *grief,* though, that look on your face. I wish I had a camera, that would be fantastic."

Judging by his body language and his second heaving sigh, Iida doesn't seem to think so, but he doesn't say this. Shouto knows what they're all feeling; watching Midoriya laugh again, after sitting by his unconscious bedside for what's felt like many years, is refreshing. It's almost healing.

"It's great to see you all again," Midoriya says, looking at each of them in turn, starting with Iida and ending with Shouto. "F-For a while there, with the villains, I mean, there were times I thought that maybe…" He stops, then laughs softly and shakes his head. "Nevermind, it's whatever. It's over now, anyway, so..."

There's a change in his tone, something that everyone catches but no one voices.

"A-Anyway, I'm guessing I probably have another streak of white hair or two," Midoriya says with a pained smile, looking to Iida. "I know I only had one during training camp, but, I probably have at least three by now, right? Maybe four?"

Oh.

The realization hits them all at once, and they look at each other for a long moment, any past joy falling from their faces.

Midoriya catches on before they can hide it. "What's the matter?" he asks, frowning. "It's not a big deal, right? I mean, it'll grow out, it's nothing—"

"Deku, you haven't…" Uraraka's voice is tight. "You haven't *seen* yourself, since...s-since the attack, have you?"

Midoriya blinks at her, and his genuine confusion might be the most painful part of all this. "...No? I mean, the villains didn't keep mirrors around, and I didn't really think about it...why?" His voice turns

sharper, more concerned. “What’s wrong with how I look?”

“There’s nothing wrong with it,” Iida says, but he looks uncomfortable, “it’s just...no, we should wait until the doctor gets here.”

“Guys, *tell me what’s wrong,”* Midoriya says sharply, and it isn’t a question anymore. “You can’t *act* like that and then brush it off like it’s nothing, *what’s wrong with how I look?”*

They don’t want to say it, none of them. Shouto isn’t sure they’d be able to force the truth out, even if they tried. Midoriya lowers his head, fists balling handfuls of the white sheets beneath him.

“Please,” he strains. “It won’t be any easier ten minutes from now, or ten days from now, or even ten years from now. If there’s something wrong, I—I need to know what it is. I can’t deal with it until I know.”

That’s true, but that doesn’t make it any easier. Eventually, Kirishima swallows hard and pulls his phone out of his back pocket, swiping his thumb across the screen.

“Here, I’ll turn it on the front camera,” he says, then bites his lip and holds the phone out to Midoriya. “Just...yeah, just...don’t freak out.”

Midoriya snatches the phone from him and holds it out in front of his own face. At first he’s curious, concerned, but when he actually sees his appearance through the face camera, his shoulders slump, and his eyes take this glassy, far-off look, like he’s staring straight through the phone instead of at it.

“...Oh.” Midoriya’s voice is quiet but startlingly calm, and he blinks several times at nothing before handing the phone back to Kirishima. “So, that’s why...I see...that, erm, that actually makes a lot of sense. I-I guess…” His voice had been scarily steady before, but now, it shakes. So does his hand. “I-I guess it makes sense. I-It, it makes perfect sense, actually…”

The tears begin to fall, and he reaches up to wipe them away with the backs of his hands. More replace them quickly, no matter how many times Midoriya attempts to brush them off.

“S-Sorry, I’m—I’m crying a lot right now,” Midoriya strains, voice choked. “I-I promise I’ll stop in a second, I-I just, y-you know me. This happens all the time, it’s just, right now I’m—I’m sorry, I can’t—”

Shouto feels his heart sink. It's not that he and the others hadn't sensed Midoriya's pain, it's just they could never imagine the depth or the magnitude of it. And watching him break down in front of them is *hard,* because while he is known for being the class crybaby (an endearing term, of course), his tears and sobs here speak of pain and torment that Shouto doesn't want to imagine. Trying to imagine them only makes him sick.

"I'm sorry," Kirishima says, eyes wide with guilt. "I shouldn't have done that, that was bad, I'm sorry—"

"I-It's not just that," Midoriya says, pressing the heels of his hands into his eyes. "I just, it's, it's just k-kinda a buildup of everything. T-The whole summoning dead people thing and getting kidnapped by the villains, now the white hair, and I didn't think I'd ever see any of you again while I was there, they wanted information and I couldn't, and Ragdoll, I—I *c-can't*— I thought I'd never *see any of you again—"*

Unsurprisingly, it's Kirishima who moves first, considering he's the closest. Uraraka, Iida, and Shouto move at about the same time afterwards, pinning their friend between them in a tight but not suffocating embrace. Midoriya clings to them, still sobbing, and that's how they stay, until Shouto's legs fall asleep beneath him and his arms are sore.

"I can't begin to tell you how relieved I am to see you up," the doctor says, looking over a clipboard. Inko is sitting on the hospital bed beside her son, resisting the urge to hold his hand. She isn't sure whether he'd be embarrassed by that or not, so she refrains, as hard as it is. "We were worried about you for a while, Midoriya-kun. It's wonderful to see you awake."

Izuku nods stiffly, though by the distant look in his eyes, his head is somewhere entirely different. Inko only wishes she knew exactly where.

"Well, we're going to keep you overnight," the doctor goes on, "and we're going to send you home with a monitor to keep constant tabs on your pulse—"

Something flickers in Izuku's eyes, something like panic. "W-Wait, where?" he asks, and without meaning to, Inko's eyes flicker down to Izuku's wrists, bandaged. She still doesn't know what's beneath them.

"Calm down," the doctor says, holding a hand out to him. "It's a

portable heart monitor. It'll go on your chest, no problem. I'm *assuming*... you don't want anything on your hands."

Izuku swallows hard, and his silence says it all. The doctor takes in a long breath, then lets it out and looks over his clipboard again.

"It says here that you have a medical bracelet due to the nature of your Quirk," he says offhandedly, "which, if you'd like, we'll be replacing with an anklet to monitor your pulse instead."

Izuku's eyes meet his. "On my ankle…?"

"There are several pulse points in your body," the doctor answers shortly, with a small smile. "Would you rather have an anklet instead of a bracelet?"

Izuku bites his lip, then nods. Inko has a pressing urge to ask why, but doesn't. There'll be time for all of that later; right now, what's most important is Izuku's recovery.

"Alrighty." The doctor marks something down on his clipboard, then flips all the pages forward and sets it on the bedside table, beneath several handmade cards. He threads his fingers together loosely, pen tucked behind his ear.

"Midoriya-kun...this is going to be hard for you to do, and I'm sure it's the last thing you want to think about, but...we're going to need your recounting of what happened. We don't have to do it now," the doctor reassures quickly, when that same panic refills Izuku's eyes. "All in your own time. And we don't need it before we send you home. But, for future reference and police investigation, we need to know what happened to you. And not just us, but the police, as well."

Izuku swallows thickly. Inko can't resist it any longer and takes his hand, and before she can think twice about it, Izuku squeezes her fingers tightly, almost too tightly. It kind of hurts, though she doesn't pull away.

"Okay," Izuku says, nodding shakily. "Okay, I can do that. N-Not now, but, soon."

The doctor nods with another small smile. "There's no rush, really," he says, "but the sooner we get this down, the better. I'll let detective Naomasa know, and when the time comes and you're ready, we'll discuss everything, alright?"

Izuku nods again, though he seems uncomfortable. The doctor notices and pats Izuku's knee gently before rising to his feet, taking his clipboard with him.

"That's all from me, for now," he says. "We'll keep you overnight, but if your levels stay the same, there's no reason why we can't send you home tomorrow. We'll discuss the heart monitor when the time comes, alright?"

Izuku nods, as does Inko, and the doctor takes his leave. Izuku still hasn't let go of her hand, and Inko doesn't question it.

Inko eventually leaves on Midoriya's nagging her about Howler and how lonely he must be, though she promises to return on her way out. Tenya assures her that he'll keep an eye on Midoriya in her stead, and she thanks him, smiles, and leaves.

Tenya, Todoroki, Kirishima, and Uraraka find themselves in Midoriya's room shortly thereafter, chatting about pointless things. Midoriya *definitely* isn't acting like himself, but just the fact that he's smiling and talking with them now is a good sign in Tenya's book. It gives him a glimmer of hope that someday, no matter how long it takes, things *will* be back to normal.

"Okay, so, I found this great website about puns," Kirishima is saying, scrolling through his phone and sitting against the headboard of the hospital bed so Midoriya can look over his shoulder. "Look at these, these are great right?"

Midoriya blinks at the screen for a few moments, then cracks a smile and shakes his head. "I've heard all of them already," he says, sitting up again, "but thanks for the thought, Kirishima. I appreciate it."

Kirishima sighs, but nods, pocketing his phone. "Dangit, man, you've probably heard *all* of the puns, how am I supposed to find any you haven't already heard?"

"Do you mean you don't *pun* derstand how to do it?"

There's a moment of silence, but before long, Kirishima is laughing, and it's so contagious in this situation that the others can't help but join in. Tenya would usually scowl at the jokes, but just hearing Midoriya *make* a joke is refreshing. Another step towards some semblance of normality.

“Oh, Midoriya, that reminds me…” Tenya pulls his phone out of his back pocket, already hating himself for what he’s about to say. “Tensei wanted me to give you a pun on his behalf.”

Midoriya perks up and turns to him. Uraraka pretends not to be upset. “A pun from Tensei? What is it?”

“He says—” Tenya reads it for the second time today and yeah, it’s still just as bad as the first time he laid eyes on it. “Tensei wanted me to tell you a joke about road construction.”

Midoriya blinks. “Road construction?”

“Indeed,” Tenya says, already mentally groaning; Midoriya’s puns are one thing, but Tensei’s are another thing altogether, “but he said he’s still working on it.”

It’d been hard forcing the words out, but Midorya’s laughter afterwards is what really makes the pain worth it.

Todoroki’s phone dings across from them, and all eyes turn to watch as he pulls it from his pocket and blinks at the screen. “Yaoyorozu,” he says, looking to Midoriya. “She says the rest of the class wants to visit, if you’re up to it.”

Midoriya blinks twice in rapid session. “...The *whole class?* At the same time?”

“Four at a time, I’d say,” Uraraka says, looking over Todoroki’s shoulder. “That is, if you’re up to it, Deku.”

“Oh, yeah, that’s—that’s perfect,” Midoriya says, nodding and smiling. “It’d be great to thank them for all the flowers and cards. If they really wanna visit me, I-I mean, that’s great.”

Todoroki nods. “I’ll let her know,” he says, thumbs swiping across the screen. “I’m sure they’ll be ecstatic.”

They are. As Class 1-A visits in groups of four, everyone is smiley and bubbly and cheery, which Tenya knows is exactly what Midoriya needs here. They keep their voices down, thankfully, after a couple reminders from Tenya and Todoroki that they are indeed in a hospital and shouldn’t disturb other patients, but their excitement goes without saying.

They talk about the flowers they got him, the cards they got him, how

Yaoyorozu helped them make sure everything was perfect, how she helped them pick meaningful flowers for the vases, how they all visited Midoriya and were worried sick about his recovery. Ashido especially says this, being more dramatic than anyone, though Tenya supposes she's always been that way.

Satou actually brings a bag of cookies with him, though he seems embarrassed about it. Midoriya thanks him profusely and says that he's sure the doctor will be okay with it. Satou still blushes, but smiles either way.

The only time Midoriya *isn't* especially upbeat is when the group made up of Tokoyami, Kaminari, Sero, and Aoyama visits. He seems distracted then, staring off into space at random intervals, barely even looking at the group. Tenya has no idea what it's about, but the moment he ushers the group away, Midoriya seems okay again.

Maybe he should ask about that later. Maybe it'll reveal itself on its own.

"Midori-chan…?"

Tsuyu visits alone, stepping into the hospital room once Todoroki and Uraraka usher the others out. She's the last Class 1-A student to visit, and when Tenya thinks back to her words to them at the plaza, it isn't hard to understand why.

"Tsuyu!" Midoriya says, beaming at her. "It's good to see you again."

Tsuyu blinks at him, then looks down at her feet. "Midori-chan, I…I have to tell you something. I knew everyone was going after you to save you from the villains, and I didn't…" Her voice hitches, then cracks. "I didn't do *anything."*

Midoriya blinks at her, once, then twice, then he smiles sympathetically and reaches a hand toward her, ushering her forward. Tsuyu does so reluctantly, and when she puts her hand in his, Midoriya pulls her into a tight embrace.

"It's like I said," he says, barely loud enough for Tenya to hear. "It's good to see you again, Tsuyu-chan."

She tenses, then hugs him back fiercely for a long time.

She leaves after a while has passed, heading out with the rest of her classmates. Uraraka puts an arm around her shoulders and walks with

her, and Kirishima is conversing with Satou about the cookies, asking if he has any recipes that he could use if he wanted to make some for Midoriya, too. That leaves Todoroki and Tenya sitting by Midoriya's bedside.

Tenya's fists are balled against his legs loosely, and something has been nagging at him ever since Midoriya woke up—no, ever since Midoriya was *kidnapped* in the first place. He meets Midoriya's eyes for a second, and the look on his face must say it clearly, because Todoroki rises to his feet and makes for the door.

"I'm gonna grab something from the snack machine," Todoroki says without looking back. "I'll be back in a few."

He leaves before anyone can question him, and now it's just Tenya and Midoriya here, alone. Tenya knows Todoroki's intentions, and while he's grateful for them he'd sooner bring this up to Midoriya in his own time, when he's ready for it.

But,

"So, what's the matter?" Midoriya asks, frowning at him. "You've got that same look on your face as you did after the thing with the Hero Killer. What's bothering you?"

Tenya takes in a long breath. The Hero Killer. That feels so very long ago now…

"I'm sorry," Tenya says; no reason to beat around the bush about it, anyway. This has been bothering him ever since training in the forest camp, when Shouto and the others had returned without Midoriya. "I'm sorry. You needed help, and I wasn't there for you. I'm—"

"You were there," Midoriya cuts in, staring off into space again, and Tenya raises his head to look at him. Midoriya pauses for a long moment, then smiles and turns to him. "When I needed you the most, you *were* there. You and Uraraka both. And Howler, too. Thank you."

Tenya gapes at him for a long moment, then allows himself a fragile smile. While he knows he'll always regret not being there for Midoriya at the training camp, he can at least hold onto the fact that he *was* there for Midoriya at Kamino.

Todoroki returns shortly with three small snack bags and a word from the doctor that Midoriya was alright to eat them. After that, the three of them chow down on their snacks together in comfortable silence.

The news reaches Mandalay soon enough, who tells Kouta of Midoriya's improving condition, and shortly thereafter finds the two of them traveling down the hallway and toward Midoriya's room.

Kouta is restless. He's been waiting for this moment ever since he first heard of Midoriya's condition, but now that it's finally come he isn't sure what to do, or what to say. Midoriya did so much for him, so much that Kouta didn't deserve and so much that Kouta could never thank him enough for, or pay him back.

"Do you want me to go in with you?" Mandalay offers gently, when they stop outside of Midoriya's room. "I can, if you'd like—"

"It's fine," Kouta answers, straightening up. "I'll be fine."

Mandalay nods, but before Kouta has the chance to enter the room, she taps his shoulder with something. An envelope. He recognizes it.

"I figured I'd hold onto this for you until you were ready to give it to him yourself in person," Mandalay explains, when Kouta turns to her with wide, betrayed eyes. "You said you wanted to thank him properly, didn't you? This is the way to do it."

Kouta tries to come up with a good counter argument, then snatches his letter from her hand when he can't. He turns toward the door for a second time, takes in a deep breath, then enters the hospital room, leaving Mandalay behind him.

Midoriya is awake, and he turns towards Kouta, wide-eyed, as soon as he steps into the room. "Kouta," Midoriya says, blinking. "...What…? Are you alright?"

"I'm fine," Kouta says, ignoring the white of Midoriya's hair and the bags under his eyes. "I'm totally fine."

Midoriya breathes a sigh of relief, and Kouta for the life of him can't figure out *why*. "I'm glad," Midoriya says, smiling at him. "I'm glad you're okay."

Kouta swallows hard, determines that he'll never understand people with Midoriya's kind of mind and heart, then crosses the room. "This is for you," he mutters, holding out the envelope. "It felt...it felt kinda stupid to say out loud, and I'm not the best with words, so…"

Midoriya takes it and tears it open, and Kouta looks away while he

reads it, too embarrassed to watch. A long moment passes, and then, he hears a small crinkle as Midoriya lowers the paper down from his face.

“Kouta, I…”

Kouta finally looks at him again, and is completely, utterly shocked to see the tears in his eyes.

“Thank you,” Midoriya says, folding the note again with great care. “I’ll treasure this always.”

Kouta tries to play it off by rolling his eyes, but inwardly, he’s just glad the note was accepted and that, by extension, Midoriya accepts *him*. “Do whatever you want with it,” Kouta says, not to be unkind, but because he doesn’t know what to say. “Just, I meant every word of that, okay? Don’t forget it.”

Midoriya smiles at him. “I won’t.”

Kouta turns to leave, but at the very last second, pauses.

“Midoriya, there’s...something else I wanted to ask you. It’s about what happened in the forest.”

He hears Midoriya’s sharp intake of breath, but pretends he doesn’t.

“Those two spirits you summoned…” It hurts to say it, but he has to know. “They reminded me of my mom and dad. A lot.”

Midoriya is silent, and when his voice comes back, it’s quiet. “They weren’t your mom and dad,” Midoriya says softly, “but...they *were* Water Horses. They came long before your parents, but...yeah.”

Kouta swallows hard. “...Thanks. I thought so, but...I had to know for sure.” He’d known they weren’t his parents, deep down somewhere close to his heart, but at the same time, he’d had his hopes, even though they were unreasonable. “I hope you recover well, Midoriya.”

He reaches for the door, but this time, it’s Midoriya who stops him.

“Kouta...if they saw you now, your parents would be really proud of you.”

Kouta inhales sharply. If he’d been told this weeks ago, before meeting Midoriya, he probably would’ve scoffed and pretended those words meant nothing to him.

But he's not the same boy he'd been back at the training camp, so instead, he wipes his eyes, murmurs a quick but honest *"Thanks,"* then flees the room and rejoins Mandalay in the hall.

Toshinori was a few rooms down, but he could still hear the commotion as the rambunctious, excited students of Class 1-A visited the hospital to see Izuku. Toshinori is glad Izuku has friends like them, and as much as he wants to be there with Izuku as well, he thinks perhaps it's better this way for now. The boy's friends visit, stay a while, then head out in chattering groups.

There are cards on Toshinori's bedside table now, too; not very many, but enough to make his heart squeeze when he looks at them. It was Ashido who came by and dropped one off from the entire class. She'd apologized, embarrassed for not thinking of getting one for him sooner all things considered, but Toshinori had assured her that it was fine. After all, it was Izuku who was top-priority, not him. Ashido had smiled, then bounced out of the room to join her classmates.

Toshinori just received word from the doctor that he would be discharged that afternoon, and almost the moment the doctor steps out of the hospital room, Todoroki steps in. He looks tired, but there's something like peace in his eyes, which Toshinori counts as a good thing.

"Ahh, Young Todoroki," he says, a bit embarrassed. Up until this point, Todoroki has known both All Might and Yagi Toshinori; however, it's only now that he knows they're actually one in the same. "I…think we've met before."

"We have." Todoroki's tone is straightforward, as always. "…I won't pry about your reasons behind keeping this a secret," he goes on, the "this" no doubt being Toshinori's true form, "and, anyway, it's pretty obvious, but…there's…something I need to ask you."

Just like Todoroki to be straight to the point. Toshinori nods. "Ask away, my boy."

"What exactly is your relationship with Midoriya?"

Toshinori stiffens, then lets out a long, heaving sigh. One For All…it's gone. He no longer holds it, and now, it'll be nothing but a memory to him. Something that he once held but holds no longer.

"…Ask Midoriya," Toshinori says, meeting Todoroki's eyes. "Once all

this has blown over, if you still want to know, ask him. I believe, now, it's more his place to tell you than mine."

Todoroki's face doesn't change, but he nods and bows shortly. "Thank you," he says once he's straightened up. "I hope you recover well, Toshinori-san."

"Thank you, my boy," Toshinori says, and Todoroki spins on his heel and heads out.

Later on that afternoon, when Izuku's classmates have gone home, Toshinori finds his way to Izuku's hospital room again. Toshinori is officially discharged now, the doctor had said so, but it doesn't feel right to leave without visiting first.

Izuku looks absolutely exhausted, but he's sitting up instead of lying down and is examining one of the small vases of flowers on the side table.

He lifts his head when he hears Toshinori enter the room. "Toshinori-san," he says, setting the vase down on the side table once again. "What are you doing here? I thought you were still recovering."

"I am," Toshinori answers, and Izuku's words remind him of his slinged arm and bandaged head, "but the doctors discharged me about an hour ago, and I wanted to come check on you before heading out. I hear they're discharging you soon, too."

Izuku nods, and Toshinori sinks into the vacant chair by the boy's bedside. "Tomorrow, they said," Izuku clarifies, looking away. "Granted my vitals stay the same, they're going to send me home with one of those portable heart-monitor...thingies."

"Ahh, yes, that makes sense." Toshinori remembers hearing from Naomasa that Izuku had developed a small and reversible heart problem, and the doctors are taking precautions to ensure the issue was resolved.

"Is Ragdoll okay?" Izuku asks, voice shaking. "I, I knew the heroes saved her, but I don't know if she's actually okay or not."

"She's here," Toshinori answers, going by a question he himself had asked Naomasa a little while ago regarding the hero. "She's still unconscious, but the doctors have hope that she'll make a full recovery. She'll be awake any day now."

Izuku lets out a sigh of relief, but it's cut short. His tone changes. "And...All For One. What of him?"

Toshinori pauses, but doesn't beat around the bush. "He's dying, to put it simply," he answers bluntly, because there's absolutely no way to go about this delicately. "Actually, from what I've heard from Naomasa, he should be dead. But, he won't die, for some reason. Despite his state of being, he's holding onto life. If you can even call the state he's in 'life' anymore."

Izuku says nothing, and Toshinori frowns. "...Midoriya?"

"...They're gone," Izuku says out of nowhere, staring at the wall and not at Toshinori. "The ex-holders. They're gone."

Toshinori blinks. "Gone?"

"They—they moved on, I mean," Izuku goes on. Toshinori still can't see his face, and his tone is simple and flat. "I'm sure you felt it, didn't you? A goodbye."

Toshinori had felt it, but at the time, he was too preoccupied with getting to Izuku to actually think about it much. "I know what you mean," he says, "but I didn't know that was them…"

He trails off, and Izuku still doesn't turn to him. "They finally found their peace, and they were able to move to the other side," Izuku says, a distant air about his voice. "Even before you told me about All For One...I kind of figured that was how it is. With All For One physically unable to come back again and hurt anyone, then...it's no wonder they all were able to find their peace so assuredly. I haven't been able to hear their voices in my head since Kamino."

Toshinori looks down at his bandaged hand and slinged arm. There's a lot he doesn't know about what Izuku went through at the hands of the villains, a lot he almost doesn't *want* to know, but he really doesn't like the tone of Izuku's voice.

"I'm glad he's gone," Izuku says sharply, and Toshinori looks up at him. Izuku's head faces forward again, though he doesn't look at Toshinori even now, and his eyes are glistening in the sunlight streaming through the window. "All For One. I'm glad he's trapped like he is. Too stubborn to give up but too weak to actually come back. He'd be better off just giving up his spirit and moving on, but *no,* he's too *damn petty* for that."

Izuku's voice has changed again. It's sharper now, spiteful.

"I can't even bring myself to feel sorry for him," Izuku says, throwing up his hands then letting them fall back down to his sides. "He could've lived a good life. He could've just moved on like everyone else, did his part, helped his brother. Kansei could've stayed alive, he could've been happy if he just—if he *didn't* become All For One."

Toshinori doesn't stop him, and Izuku plunges on.

"And it's *all his damn fault* that he ended up like this," Izuku bites. "It's all his fault that he's trapped in this limbo between life and death. It's all his fault that he'll never be satisfied, that he'll never accept that he's *lost.* It's his damn fault that he's dying. It's his *damn fault* that *they* died."

Izuku stops himself there and takes in a long, deep breath. When he blinks, tears fall, and Toshinori can't tell if they're out of sorrow or frustration. "I'm sorry," Izuku says, running both hands through his hair, heedless of the IV tube. "I'm sorry, I just, I can't, every time I think about him, I just, I want, I'm—"

"Midoriya…"

"I *hate him,"* Izuku chokes out. "Everything just kinda *clicked* when the ex-holders moved on and I actually *thought about* how long they've been there, trapped by the torment he put them through and I hate him so much, and I *hate* that I hate him so much."

"Midoriya, listen—"

"And *then,* and then there's what he did to Ragdoll, and what he did to me, and what he did to every other person out there who *didn't deserve it,* it's what he did to all of them, all the people out there who had lives and dreams and hopes and futures and they *didn't want to die—"*

Toshinori reaches out slowly and pulls Izuku into his arms again, making sure to keep it loose in case the boy wants to pull away, but he doesn't. He clings to Toshinori tightly and buries his face against his shoulder, sobbing.

"They *didn't want to die,* Toshinori-san, *none of them,"* Izuku gasps out through gritted teeth. "They *didn't want to die,* they wanted to live and be with their friends and families, and when they *did* die they couldn't even find peace, they wanted peace so badly but they couldn't even have that and now All For One is *refusing* to take peace he *doesn't even*

deserve when peace was the *only damn thing the ex-holders wanted—"*

Toshinori lets him rant his pain and frustrations, and it goes on for a very long while.

"Father isn't home again?" Shouto asks, once he realizes just how unnervingly *quiet* it is in his home. The sun has set outside, and Fuyumi is working on a stack of papers on the living room coffee table. She looks up at Shouto when he comes in, then sighs and gives a short nod.

"Guess that's what comes with him being the number one hero," Fuyumi says, shaking her head right after she's through nodding. "All Might announced his official retirement earlier today, which by default makes Endeavor number one. Last I heard he had to go meet with a group of heroes on short-notice. They had a couple questions for him, I think. About what he thought about all this, or something."

Shouto nods, thinking this over. "If he's gone," he says, turning around again, "then I think I'm going to go to a friend's house."

"Again?" Fuyumi asks, blinking. "Shouto, if Father finds out about this —"

"He's too busy right now to notice," Shouto cuts in sharply. "Besides, so long as I don't catch myself alone with him, there's nothing he can do to me. He's the number one hero now, the world is watching him more than ever. He can't make any slip ups, not now."

Fuyumi doesn't seem entirely convinced, but she nods regardless. "I'll cover for you if he comes home," she says. "I'll just say you went jogging or something. Tell your friends I say hi, okay?"

"I will. Thank you, Nee-san."

She waves a hand passively, and Shouto heads out for the Midoriyas. He knows Midoriya isn't home yet, but the doctors seemed pretty certain he'd be coming home tomorrow morning, and Shouto wants to be there for that.

Shouto waits at the apartment with Howler while Inko returns to the hospital. Howler paces restlessly, like he senses something is about to happen, though Shouto has no idea how exactly he knows this. He gets a text from Inko roughly an hour after she sets out; a message

confirming that she's on her way home with Midoriya now and that the doctors gave him full clearance.

Now it's just a matter of playing the waiting game until they arrive. Howler is sitting by the door again, like he's been doing in long intervals ever since Shouto got here (and, now that he thinks about it, *probably* ever since Midoriya was originally kidnapped), and Shouto is half tempted to turn on his phone and record Howler's reaction.

He doesn't. He'd rather live this.

About half an hour passes, and Howler remains seated at the door, staring at the knob. Shouto watches from the couch, waiting for a change; and then, Howler's head tilts to one side, ever so slightly. When Shouto listens closer, he hears approaching footsteps.

Howler is on his feet now, tail swishing back and forth, and Shouto swings himself off the couch and to his feet as well. Howler doesn't even seem to notice him. The footsteps get closer, the knob jingles, and then the door swings open to reveal Inko, and of course Midoriya.

Midoriya looks absolutely exhausted, right up until he notices Howler by the door. After that, his eyes *light up.*

"Aww, Howler!" Midoriya cries, beaming. Howler *loses it,* barking and spinning around in celebratory circles, bouncing around, so excited he looks like he could explode. Midoriya kneels on the ground, and Howler jumps into his arms, nuzzling his head under Midoriya's chin, tail swishing back and forth frantically.

Shouto approaches, and Midoriya raises his head. When they meet eyes, Midoriya smiles, and Shouto can't help but smile back.

Midoriya doesn't do much, which is expected. After Howler finally calms down and he's able to cross the room, he faceplants the couch and sleeps for a solid three hours. Shouto sits on the other end of the couch; Howler had hopped onto Midoriya's back and is curled there, alert, and Shouto scrolls through his phone absentmindedly.

The news is boring; all anyone wants to talk about is All Might's retirement, All For One's imprisonment, and Midoriya's recovery, which is, honestly, the only things going on right now worth talking about. Shouto's a little tired of hearing about it, to be completely honest; now that everything's done and done, he'd rather just move on.

But, anyway.

“News feeds?”

Shouto turns. Midoriya is sitting up, Howler flopped over in his lap lazily; just above the collar of Midoriya’s shirt, Shouto sees one of the stickers of his portable heart monitor. The device is small and tucks under his shirt, unnoticeable unless you know it’s there, and Shouto nods at Midoriya and looks down at his phone again.

“Yeah, but it’s nothing interesting,” Shouto says, scrolling through his phone absentmindedly again. “There’re a lot of crazy theories regarding the shrine you set up and the spirits that fought All For One, though.”

Midoriya tilts his head. “Oh? Color me intrigued, go on.”

“Some people are making connections between the spirits and the shrine,” Shouto answers simply. “A lot of people are kinda guessing the people who fought All For One were spirits, though they still aren’t sure. A lot of theories have branched out from that.”

“Huh.” Midoriya blinks. “Like what?”

“Get this.” Shouto turns to him fully and clears his throat needlessly. “‘Seven spirits and All Might versus the notorious supervillain, All For One. Were these spirits All For One’s victims? Have they returned from the grave for one last vengeance spree?’”

Midoriya snorts. “So they didn’t think I had anything to do with it,” he says. “Man. They’re willing to say that they’re ghosts but not some kid’s Quirk.”

“Okay, but the thread goes on,” Shouto says, scrolling down further. “Some of them think they’re paying homage to the shrine. This one person says, ‘Maybe the spirits wanted to fight the villain in a way of thanking whoever made the shrine, or something.’ Seems kinda far fetched, but, y’know. Conspiracy theory sites.”

Midoriya blinks at him, looking somewhere between confused and awed. “I didn’t know you were into that kinda stuff.”

Shouto nods and keeps scrolling. “Did you know that Endeavor is All Might’s evil twin?”

Midoriya *chokes.* “Oh *heck no.*”

Shouto shrugs idly. “The theory’s out there—”

“Heck *no.”* Midoriya actually chucks one of the couch pillows at him, and Shouto grabs it and tucks it under his elbows, scrolling through his phone again.

“Either way, though, the theories are pretty far fetched,” Shouto says, bringing the conversation back around to where it started. “Kinda weird they didn’t even think to add you in there anywhere, but anyway.”

“Yeah…” Midoriya gets that distant, far-off look in his eyes again, like he’s recalling something that happened years ago. He brushes it off with a sharp exhale and a shake of his head. “Anyway.”

“Anyway…” Shouto shuts off his phone and sets it aside. “You wanna play cards or something?”

“Sure.”

It doesn’t last long. They play a few rounds of Go Fish, and then that gets boring so they shift to Egyptian Rat-Slap, and then that gets boring so they switch to War, and then that gets boring so they take turns playing a Candy Crush-esque game on Midoriya’s phone (which *definitely* doesn’t make Shouto want to punch something, nope, no sir).

Luckily for them (and for their tempers), Inko comes to tell them shortly thereafter that dinner is ready and that she doesn’t mind them eating in the living room if Midoriya doesn’t feel up to coming to the table. Midoriya thanks her, and soon after, Shouto and Midoriya are digging into their own bowls of katsudon.

Shouto makes a mental reminder for himself to ask Inko for the recipe.

“It’s my favorite food,” Midoriya says absentmindedly, his smile turning sad. “It’s...it’s nice, after everything.”

Shouto swallows, then pushes his rice around needlessly with his chopsticks. Midoriya is quiet for a while, almost too quiet, but then, he taps Shouto’s knee with his toe, and Shouto turns to him again.

“I’m glad you’re here, Thermostat” Midoriya says, smiling softly. It isn’t the brightest smile Shouto’s ever seen from him, but it’s definitely one of the most honest. “It’s...it’s nice to have a friend.”

Shouto can't help it; he returns the smile, and he's sure it's equally soft, but he hopes Midoriya can see the sincerity behind it. "It's nice to have you here," he says. Midoriya exhales a shaky breath, but his smile grows ever so slightly.

It isn't long after dinner that they decide to call it a night. It's been a long past couple of days for all of them, Shouto, Inko, but especially for Midoriya, and none of them are too keen on the idea of staying up late.

"Be sure to come get me if you need anything, okay?" Inko says after kissing Midoriya on the forehead. "Wake me up if you need to, I don't mind."

Midoriya nods, but Shouto's known him long enough to know that he definitely wouldn't do that. Not unless it was dire. "Thanks, Mom," he says, smiling gently at her. "For everything."

Inko returns the smile, then bids Shouto goodnight likewise (also kissing his forehead, to which Shouto stares off into space for a solid ten seconds) and heads to her bedroom.

"Text me if you need me," Shouto says, when he hears the door click behind Inko. "I know you'd probably feel awkward actually coming and waking me up, but text me if you need someone to talk to, alright?"

Midoriya blinks at him, looking uncertain, but he nods. "I'll keep that in mind," he says. "Thanks, I...that means a lot to me."

Shouto shakes his head. "Don't worry about it," he says. "Sleep well, Spearmint."

Midoriya exhales sharply and cracks a goofy smile. "You too, Thermostat."

Howler settles on top of Midoriya on the couch again (Midoriya scowls at him, but Shouto can tell he doesn't mean it), and after one final goodnight, Shouto departs toward the guest bedroom. Maybe he'll be able to sleep better now that Midoriya is home and safe.

Shouto is in the middle of an unpleasant what-if kind of dream when something wet nuzzles his hand.

Sitting upright, he looks around wildly, heart throbbing in his chest. It turns out to only be Howler, which relieves Shouto at first, until he thinks about it. It's only Howler. Howler, who'd yapped and bounced around excitedly when Midoriya walked through the door, who hadn't left Midoriya's side all evening.

Until now.

More awake than before, Shouto swings his legs off the side of the bed and gets to his feet. Howler immediately spins toward the door, which is open, despite that Shouto had closed it on his way in. A quick glance at the digital clock on the bedside table tells him that it's about two in the morning, give or take. Definitely no time to be awake.

Howler darts down the hallway, quick but silent, and Shouto pursues him likewise. Even without Howler leading him, Shouto would know exactly where to go: the living room, specifically the couch where Midoriya was sleeping.

Howler stops just before the couch and lets out a quiet whine. Shouto kneels beside him, threading his fingers through Howler's fur soothingly to quiet him, then looks toward Midoriya.

It's dark, but his eyes have adjusted to it by now. Midoriya is curled on his side, eyes closed, half-covered with a blanket, and…

There are tears on his cheeks.

Shouto's eyes widen in shock, and something in his chest twists and seizes—probably his heart. He lets Howler go, understanding just why the dog came to him in the first place. Midoriya seems to be asleep, judging by the fact that he hadn't heard Shouto or Howler approach, but the tears…

Shouto swallows hard, then gathers his will and reaches out, settling his hand on Midoriya's shoulder. As much as he hates to wake him, he can't let Midoriya stay in whatever thing he's reliving in his dreams.

So.

"Hey, Midoriya." Shouto keeps his voice as low as he can, and he gives Midoriya's shoulder a tiny shake. "Midoriya. Hey. Wake up for a second."

Midoriya stirs and opens his eyes slowly, blinking. It's nowhere near as dramatic as Shouto originally thought it'd be, and Midoriya blinks

once or twice more, then looks up at Shouto, confused. There are still tears in Midoriya's eyes, and more run down his face slowly.

"Thermos…?" Midoriya blinks again, looking both more awake and more exhausted than ever. He sits up, and Shouto retracts his hand. "What…?"

Howler scampers off, for some reason, and Shouto moves to sit on the couch beside Midoriya. "You were crying in your sleep," Shouto says quietly, barely above a whisper. "...You're still crying, actually."

"A-Am I?" Midoriya asks shakily, reaching up to touch his face. "Oh...g-guess I am. Funny that."

"I don't think it's funny."

The moment the words are out, Shouto almost wishes he could snatch them back and try for a gentler approach, but the words are out there now, and Midoriya looks down, silent.

Shouto hesitates, then shifts so he's facing Midoriya, knees drawn against his chest and arms wrapped around them. "...Midoriya...what were you dreaming about?"

Midoriya looks uncomfortable. "I...I-I don't really…"

"If you don't want to talk about it, just say the word," Shouto cuts in. "I get it, I…" Midoriya's hair is a stark contrast to the dark, and looking at it now makes Shouto's stomach twist. "...I get it, believe me. You don't have to talk about anything."

Midoriya doesn't look at him. "Thermostat, I...I-I don't want to talk about what happened. At Kamino. But...I...I lied to you about something. I lied to all of you about something, and...it's...it's been bothering me for a long time."

Shouto frowns. "...Okay?"

Midoriya takes in a breath. Whatever this is, he's struggling with it. "You asked me once, about my connection with All Might."

"Yeah." Shouto nods. "Another conspiracy theory for the database, what of it?"

"I-I…" Midoriya looks so uncomfortable and uneasy that it's putting Shouto on edge. "You...you like crazy theories like that, right?"

“When they’re worth thinking about, sometimes, yeah.”

“...All Might and I…” Midoriya fiddles with the hem of his blanket. “...Our Quirks are really similar, don’t you think? The...the mutation one I told you about before, I mean. The one that enhances my physical abilities.”

“Yeah,” Shouto says, nodding, “so, what…”

He doesn’t know why it clicks now when it hadn’t before, but it does. He stiffens, stills, and across from him, Midoriya won’t meet his eyes.

“...You two…? Is it the same…?”

Midoriya swallows. “It’s...it’s called One For All,” he says, very quietly. “It’s the only Quirk in the history of the world that can be passed on from user to user. I’m the ninth holder.”

“The ninth—” Something else clicks. “There were seven ghosts at Kamino—”

“Yeah, those were…” Midoriya reaches up and rubs his eyes. “T-Those were the past users. They liked you a lot. They said they were glad I had a friend like you. They hated Endeavor every bit as much as we do.”

“...Midoriya…”

“They’re gone, now.” Midoriya’s voice goes from shaky to startlingly calm. “They finally found their peace and moved on. And, I don’t know, I just...I was thinking about them a lot, and—” He stops, draws in a shuddering breath, then shakes his head. “You can’t tell anyone, please—”

“I won’t.” It’s a promise. “Toshinori-san—All Might, he mentioned this earlier. Something about it being your decision whether or not to tell me the truth. I’m glad I know now, but...I understand why you had to lie about it.”

“It’s what All For One wanted.” Midoriya’s voice is tight. “The villain. He tried getting me to give him One For All, and when I didn’t, he—” He stops before he gives himself the chance to finish, and he shakes his head feverishly. “I-I’m sorry, I—”

“No, it’s, it’s okay,” Shouto says, keeping his tone soft. He’s got a dozen questions buzzing through his mind, but nothing so pressing

that they can't talk about it some other time. "You don't have to tell me anything."

He almost doesn't want to know; the doctor had called the condition of Midoriya's hair "Marie Antoinette Syndrome," a result of tremendous, *tremendous* pain and stress. Shouto doesn't want to know the extent of it.

"Just, in your own time," Shouto says, shaking his head. "In your own time, Midoriya. We've got all of our future ahead of us now. Let's just...let's just focus on healing for now, alright?"

Midoriya bites his lip, but nods. "...Todoroki, there's...there's this one other thing. S-Something no one else knows about."

Shouto frowns. "Not even Toshinori-san?"

"Not even Toshinori-san. Or my mom. Or anyone in the class."

Shouto would be lying if he said he wasn't curious, but at the same time, "You don't have to tell me if you don't want to. Whatever it is —"

"I have to tell someone," Midoriya cuts in sharply, and Shouto stops. "I-I have to tell someone, I can't...I can't deal with it anymore."

Shouto blinks. "...Okay, Midoriya. What is it?"

Midoriya rises to his feet, and Shouto does the same beside him. "Follow me," Midoriya says, turning and heading down the hall, and Shouto does as he's been instructed. Midoriya pushes open the door of the hall bathroom and flicks on the lights; they're bright, but Shouto's eyes adjust quickly, while his confusion (and fear) only continues to rise. He pulls the door shut behind him, locks it, then turns to face Midoriya.

Midoriya looks even worse in the light. There's something about Midoriya's hair that Shouto can't seem to shake, and that scar splitting his face looks absolutely terrible. It always does, but it looks almost worse, now. More pronounced. Just like the dark circles under his eyes.

"So, um, I…" Midoriya shifts his weight. "I-I told you how I got this, right?" He traces the scar across his face with his index finger.

Shouto nods. "You smacked your head on a desk," he recalls, "when

you transferred schools."

"Y-Yeah," Midoriya says, shifting his weight again. "That's, um...t-that's how I thought it happened too."

Shouto blinks. "...I don't understand."

Midoriya runs both hands through his hair nervously and lets out a shaky laugh. "I mean I always thought it happened like that too," he says, "but then I realized that at the Sports Festival, when I saw your spirit, you didn't actually have your *physical* scar on your spirit and I just, y'know I thought it was kinda weird so I kept it in mind but didn't really think much of it but now this came up and I just kinda...I-I'm kind of, y'know, I just, everything I thought I knew is turned on its head now and I'm really confused and scared and I don't even know what's—"

Shouto reaches out and settles his hands on Midoriya's shoulders. Midoriya jumps and turns to face him, but Shouto doesn't pull away. "Midoriya. Calm down, alright? The last thing you want to do now is panic."

Midoriya sucks in a long, shaky breath, then nods feverishly. "Y-Yeah, you're right, I—I know, I'm...s-sorry, I just, everything's super up in the air right now and...I don't know. I don't know anything, Todoroki, I...I *can't."*

Shouto releases him and steps back, more worried than before. "What were you saying about your scar?" he says, trying to bring the original topic back. "You said you thought you got it by smacking your head on the desk, but…?"

Midoriya takes in a breath. "M-Maybe...maybe I should just show you."

Shouto doesn't think he likes that, but he nods, and Midoriya turns his back to Shouto and pulls his shirt over his head.

There's a long, jagged scar stretching diagonally from Midoriya's shoulder blade to his waist. It's healed now, but it looks like it'd been very deep, very *painful.*

Shouto finds himself unable to form words. Midoriya yanks his shirt back over his head, but doesn't turn to look at him.

"I-I never really thought about it," Midoriya starts slowly. "The scar

on my face. I mean, the doctors were surprised by how quickly it healed, and it never really scabbed over like a normal gash would. We just bandaged it, and a week later, I was left with a scar. It wasn't until Tensei brought it up at the hospital that I actually stopped to think about it."

A part of Shouto wants to say something, but he can't think of anything worth saying or even anything helpful. So he stays quiet, and Midoriya plunges on.

"...W-When I hit the desk, I...I was at a really bad spot in my life," Midoriya says quietly, voice shaking. "Mentally, emotionally, everything was—everything was really jacked up. I didn't know what my problem was, I didn't know why no one liked me, I didn't know why Bakugou hated me like he did. I was scared, I was lost, I was confused, and then—and then my new classmates pranked me, and I just—they were scared of me, too, after I dropped out of my body. They were scared of me, just like everyone else, and that—t-that really hit me. It hit me hard. A-And, that was...that was the hardest thing I'd ever been through. That was the hardest day of my life, until…" Midoriya's breath hitches. "...U-Until now."

Shouto opens his mouth, to say what, he'll never know, because Midoriya doesn't give him the chance to get a word in.

"And it's so *stupid,"* Midoriya says, running his hands through his hair again and turning to Shouto half-way. He's crying again, but he looks angry. "It's so *stupid,* y-y'know? Just when I think I've figured out my Quirk it pulls *this* on me. I've always had a closer connection with my spirit, and I just thought that was why I had the scar on my physical body *and* on my spirit while you *didn't,* but no, it's not that simple. It can never be that simple, not with me."

He's ranting again, barely stopping to breathe, and Shouto steps forward again. "Midori—"

"It's a *damn emotional scar,"* Midoriya chokes, then makes a sound somewhere between a bitter laugh and a desperate sob. "And now it's not just one but *two.* The doctor didn't even know how to describe it, it healed so *freakishly fast* and it's all because of my *damn Quirk* and *All For One* and I'm just, it's so *freaking stupid—"*

"I don't think it's stupid."

Midoriya *stops* and stares at him with wide, tear-filled eyes. The rage has faded, replaced with stunned shock. "W-What?"

“I don’t think it’s stupid,” Shouto repeats, chancing another step forward. Midoriya lets him draw closer. “It’s not stupid, Midoriya. It’s not.”

The shock breaks, and Midoriya ducks his head and chokes on a sob. “It *feels stupid.”*

“I know. But it’s not.”

Midoriya’s hands come up towards his face, brushing away tears, and after a few moments of mental warring with himself, Shouto settles his hand on Midoriya’s shoulder lightly.

“Do you…want a hug?”

Midoriya’s head snaps up, and their eyes meet. Shouto has never been good at the “delicate situation” thing, the “knowing what to say” thing, the “comforting your best friend when he’s hurt and in pain” thing.

But Midoriya had done this for him once before, and he hasn’t forgotten the impact it left.

Maybe he can finally return the favor.

It doesn’t take long for Midoriya to step into his arms, and Shouto hugs him tightly, *probably* too tightly, but Midoriya doesn’t seem to mind. He embraces Shouto back with equal ferocity, crying, and it’s becoming increasingly hard for Shouto to hold his own tears back.

The couch is small, but there’s no way Shouto is leaving Midoriya alone after that, and Midoriya must feel the same way. When they head back into the living room, Howler is sitting there patiently with a plastic water bottle between his teeth, which Midoriya takes with a quiet thank you and downs half of it before settling it on the floor beside the couch.

After that, Midoriya and Shouto lay down on the couch, and after some rearranging and repositioning, they find a comfortable spot. The space is so small that their foreheads are nearly touching, but there’s a blanket covering them and Howler is laying on top of them, and Shouto has nothing to complain about.

“…You know something…”

Midoriya blinks at him, and his eyes are shining in the dark and Shouto *almost* can't look at them, but they aren't nearly as bright as they usually are.

"...You've always called yourself a coward," Shouto says quietly, "but...you're probably one of the bravest people I know. If not *the* bravest."

Midoriya smiles at him tiredly, then shuts his eyes and inches closer. Shouto wraps his arms around Midoriya's shoulders, and Midoriya hugs him around his waist. There's nothing odd or awkward about it, only warmth and comfort.

"Funny," Midoriya murmurs, but Shouto can hear the smile behind the words, "I was just gonna say the same thing about you."

Shouto shakes his head, but smiles faintly and rests his chin atop Midoriya's head. "...Thank you for telling me all of this, Midoriya," he says, when he thinks about it. "Everything, about...about the mutation Quirk. About your scars."

Midoriya takes in a breath, but doesn't tense. "...Izuku."

Shouto frowns. "What?"

"You can call me Izuku. I've dumped an awful lot on you tonight, and we've been friends for a long time, s-so if you want to, I...I'd like you to call me Izuku."

"Izuku…" It feels weird, almost, but not *wrong*. "...Alright. And...I'd like you to call me Shouto. I've dumped an equal amount of stuff on you since we became friends—actually, I dumped a lot on you *before* we became friends, and—you're probably the closest friend I've ever had, so...please."

"...Shouto, huh?" Midoriya—Izuku—lets out a soft laugh. "I'll probably end up calling you Thermostat more than not, but...thanks, Shouto."

It feels weird for Izuku to call him that, too, but there's also something very perfect and natural about it at the same time.

"You should probably try to get some sleep, if you can," Shouto murmurs. "Do you think you'll be okay, or…?"

"Yeah, I...I think I can sleep now," Izuku says, nodding. Shouto feels

the movement against his shoulder. “I feel better than before. Just a little bit, but...enough.”

Shouto nods, shutting his eyes. “Be sure to wake me up if something happens.”

“I will. Thanks, Thermos—Shouto. For...for everything.”

“Thank you, too. Goodnight.”

“Goodni—hey wait, I just thought of something.”

“What is it?”

“What happens to nitrogen when the sun comes up?”

“...I’m scared.”

“It becomes daytrogen.”

“...Izuku...I think we both need to sleep.”

“Yeah, you’re right…” Izuku nods again, settling down. “Sorry.”

“It’s fine.” Shouto shuts his eyes again. “Good night, Izuku.”

“Good nightrogen.”

“...Izuku.”

“Sleep tightrogen.”

“Izuku.”

“Don’t let the bedbugs bitetrogen.”

Shouto sighs, but he’d be lying if he said he didn’t miss Izuku’s jokes. “Good nightrogen to you too, then.”

Izuku laughs softly, then falls silent. It doesn’t take long for Izuku to fall asleep, and shortly thereafter, Shouto drifts off as well.

Chapter End Notes

> I know I haven't been leaving any real author's notes lately fkjdfg, sorry guys. Life's been hectic. But, thank you all so much for your support!! Now that the story's winding down and coming to a close within the next couple of chapters, I think updates might

start getting a bit slower, too. But, they should be longer chapters I think so I need more time dfjdfgdlf.

Thank you all so much for all your kind words and encouragements. It really means a lot to me, more than you realize. Thank you all so much, and I'll see you next chapter!!

History Has Its Eyes On You

Chapter Summary

"History Has Its Eyes On You" from Hamilton

“I know that greatness lies in you,
But remember from here on in,
That history has its eyes on you.”

Chapter Notes

you guys there's so much art i'm
;-; thank you all sm

wailing-whaler

Another by wailing-whaler

verassi

icanceledart

onlymilestogo 2

sleepdeprivedidiothue

anonymouseling

bookiecokkie

skyorchid13

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Shouto opens his eyes the next morning, Midoriya is sprawled half on top of him and half hanging precariously off the couch while Howler sits on top of them both, tongue hanging out the side of his mouth and tail swishing to and fro.

Shouto blinks several times to clear the sleep from his eyes. The wirebox of Midoriya’s holter monitor is digging into his stomach, and it’s not *super* uncomfortable, but after a while the ache is annoying. Plus, the current arrangement, while equally not uncomfortable, *is* equally annoying.

He's glad he sleeps like the dead, because with all Midoriya's tossing and turning, he would've gotten very tired of it.

It's now that he reminds himself that it's not Midoriya anymore, but rather, Izuku. The thought brings him back to their conversation last night, and Shouto lets out a long, heaving breath and shuts his eyes.

Last night was…

…Yeah.

Eventually, the position becomes too much to bear, and Shouto shifts and shakes Izuku's shoulder. "Hey, Midor—Izuku." Nothing happens. *"Izuku.* Wake up." He shakes him again. Still nothing. Howler is no help. "Okay, fine, maybe I can just…"

He shifts again with the intention of pulling himself out from under Izuku without waking him, but it backfires terribly. Shouto *does* free himself, but it happens at the expense of Izuku rolling off the couch and hitting the floor with a *thump* and tired, disgruntled yelp.

Shouto *winces,* and he kind of wishes he could hide in the couch cushions. *"Sorry,"* he says, grimacing. "I was trying not to wake you."

Izuku sits up with a pained groan, rubbing his head. "I guess… *heck,* what time is it…"

"I don't know," Shouto says; Howler hops off the couch and begins licking a soon-to-be-bruise on Izuku's temple. "…Good morning."

Izuku stares at him from the floor, hair mussed, eyes narrowed in a tired scowl. Shouto stares back at him.

Then, Izuku cracks a smile, and seconds later, the two have completely dissolved into laughter.

Todoroki—no, wait, Shouto. He can call him Shouto now—doesn't stay for long after that. Mom offers to let him stay for breakfast, but Shouto shakes his head.

"I got a text from my old man," Shouto says, pocketing his phone and slinging his bag over his shoulder. "U.A.'s sending someone over to talk to him, and he wants me to be there. Thank you for your hospitality." He bows lowly to Mom, then turns towards Izuku. "Take care of yourself. Recover well."

“I will,” Izuku says, nodding with a smile. “Thanks for being here, Thermostat. Shouto.”

Shouto smiles at him, faintly but honestly, and after one final pat on the head to Howler, he heads off, and Izuku returns to the couch to sit down. Last night had been emotionally draining; he already knows it’s going to be hard to get by today.

Howler hops onto Izuku’s lap, and Izuku snatches his phone off the coffee table and scrolls aimlessly through his apps with nothing better to do. He’s just about to start up one of his games, if just to keep him distracted, when Mom’s soft footsteps reach his ears.

“...Izuku?”

He raises his head, setting his phone aside. He can’t really sit up with Howler sprawled across him, but he does his best. “What is it?” Izuku asks.

Mom swallows hard, fiddling with the hem of her shirt. It’s not a good sign. “There’s...something I need to discuss with you.”

Izuku blinks. “About U.A.?”

Mom shakes her head, biting her lip. “No, Izuku, it’s—it’s about something else. We really—” She drags in a shuddering breath, and her eyes shimmer. “We really need to talk.”

When Nedzu calls in the teachers that morning to discuss their upcoming dorm system, Toshinori almost wonders why they hadn’t thought of this sooner.

Ever since the beginning of the school year, all the way back to the USJ, the students have been put in danger time, time, and time again. Izuku’s being kidnapped may have been the straw that finally broke the camel’s back—and the trust of the rest of the world—but honestly; they may have benefitted from a dorm system sooner.

“We will be sending out teachers to discuss the proposal with the parents of the students,” is basically the bulk of what is said by Nedzu at the meeting. With no further discussion to be had, the teachers are given the locations to their students’ family homes and go out in groups.

“Looks like I’ll be hitting the Todoroki household,” Aizawa says

darkly, flanking Toshinori as they head down the hall away from the conference room. “I doubt I’ll be able to cross the threshold before I get Enji’s stamp of approval.”

Toshinori nods stiffly. He still hasn’t forgotten what Izuku said to him regarding Endeavor at the sports festival, how he was a man not to be trusted for reasons Izuku hadn’t actually voiced.

“They put you on the tough one, though, didn’t they?” Aizawa goes on, and Toshinori looks down at the sheet of paper in his hands and sighs longly through his nose. He and Aizawa will be stopping by some of the students’ houses together, but…

Midoriya Izuku, says the sheet of paper, followed by an address that Toshinori already knows. He hasn’t faced his protege since he was discharged from the hospital, and the time hadn’t exactly been the best. Toshinori knows that, physically, Izuku is recovering well, but his mental state is something entirely different.

When it comes to Izuku continuing through U.A., Toshinori has no idea what he’ll say.

But that’s only part of it. He can still feel the sting on his cheek from when Inko had slapped him all that time ago. He’s just as afraid to face his student’s mother as he is to actually face his student.

“Good luck,” Aizawa says, and although his voice doesn’t carry much emotion, ever, Toshinori can hear the sincerity behind the words.

He nods. “You too.”

Raising his fist and knocking at the door is admittedly one of the hardest things Toshinori has had to do in a long time. Swinging his fists at villains had been easier than rapping his knuckles against the door of the Midoriyas’ apartment. And he hasn’t even *thought* about what he’s going to say to the people inside.

A long while passes, and for a mortifying second, he thinks he may have to knock again, but then he hears locks siding back, and the door opens to reveal a weary, tired-eyed Inko. Toshinori is almost twice her height, but he’s never been more intimidated.

“Ahh, good afternoon,” he says, bowing shortly, but meaningfully. “I apologize for the suddenness of all this…”

“Oh, n-no, it’s fine,” Inko says, shaking her head and backing out of the doorway, into the house. “Come in, please.”

Toshinori steels his breath and accepts the invitation, pulling the door shut behind him and slipping off his shoes. Inko has already disappeared down the hallway, and after a few moments, Toshinori follows.

Lined on either side of the hall are framed pictures. Toshinori had noticed them once before, but hadn’t given them much thought until now. There are pictures of Izuku when he was younger, growing up; the most recent one is of him and Howler, and Izuku has a peace sign held up to the camera, as well as a full head of green hair. It looks odd, considering its state now.

That reminds him.

He steps into the living room. Inko is trying to unravel a long, black cord. “Where *is* Izuku?” he asks, both worried and curious (though mostly worried). “Is he out?”

“He’s sleeping,” Inko answers, settling the detangled cord on the coffee table. “This past little while…hasn’t been easy on him.”

Toshinori can’t imagine what it’s been like. “Inko-san…I—”

Inko spins around and holds out both hands to him. “Don’t,” she says, “just—” She squeezes her eyes shut, sucks in a long breath. “Don’t. There’s—” She drops her hands back down to her side, shoulders stiff. “There’s something I want to show you.”

Toshinori meets her gaze. Even if he wasn’t curious, he has no right to say no to this woman right now. “…Alright.”

Inko leaves the room for a moment, returning with a small, silver laptop tucked under her arm and a video camera in her other hand. She sets the objects on the coffee table, then sinks down into the couch and gestures to the spot beside her. Toshinori accepts the invite, taking a seat next to her while she opens the laptop and hooks the USB into the camera.

“I found this,” Inko says quietly, “back while Izuku was still…” She trails off, shakes her head with a long exhale, and keeps fiddling with the cord. “I’d gotten it for his birthday a long time ago. I hadn’t seen it in years; I’d forgotten about it.”

The folder pops up on-screen, and Inko highlights the videos—there are several of them—and sets them on a slideshow.

"Just—watch," Inko says, sitting back and biting her lip, and Toshinori says nothing more. The screen goes black for a moment; and then, the video lights it up once again.

"Is this on? Hellooooo? Mom I think I broke it—"

"No, it's working, see the light?"

Izuku can't be older than five. At the *most.* He has his face almost too close to the camera, but once he's confirmed that it's indeed functioning properly, he sits back and *beams.* There's no scar splitting his face; that's one of the first things Toshinori notices.

"It works!" he says, beaming and spreading his arms wide. *"MomMomMom it works!"*

Off-screen, Toshinori hears Inko chuckle. *"That's great, sweetie."*

Little-Izuku beams again, and now that Toshinori takes a moment to look at the boy's surroundings, he sees balloons and streamers. A birthday.

"So…" Izuku looks to the side, no doubt where Inko is sitting off-screen. A look of confusion overcomes his face. *"What do I do now?"*

"You can talk about what day it is today," Inko says, and Toshinori can hear the smile behind her voice. *"It's a very special day, isn't it, Izuku?"*

"Oh!" Realization seems to dawn on him, and Izuku is smiling at the camera once more. *"That's right! It's my birthday today! I'm turning…"* His brows furrow together. He seems to be in deep thought. He looks at Inko, who whispers something unintelligible, and Izuku's smile returns. *"Five!"* he says decidedly.

Off-screen, Inko laughs.

"Well, we're going to open the rest of your presents," she says, *"so say goodbye to the camera for now, Izuku!"*

"Bye, camera!" Izuku waves at it, and after a bit of fumbling, the screen cuts to black.

The next video plays. Izuku looks slightly older now, and by the unsteadiness of the images playing out, he's walking with it.

"So, I'm going to a new grade soon!" Izuku tells the camera with a smile. *"Soon! I don't remember what grade though. I'll have to ask Mom about it when I get home. But I'm super excited! It's going to be fun!"*

The screen cuts; the next video begins. Izuku is sitting on his bed with the video balanced on something that's tipping it a little to one side. Izuku's front teeth are missing, and he has several notebooks sprawled out in front of him.

"Hi, me again!" he says, waving for just a moment. *"I started keeping journals a little while ago! I was gonna make a video about it sooner but I lost the camera for a while…"* He looks down sadly for a moment, then perks up again. *"But, anyway, this is number oneeee…"* He picks up one of the notebooks and holds it up to the camera. The words on the front are completely out of focus, but he pulls back quickly. *"I've been watching a lot of hero fights on TV lately. All Might's my favorite. He's sooooo cool, oh my gosh…"*

Something in Toshinori's chest constricts. His throat feels tight.

"And here's book number two…and book number three…and book number four…I'm going to make more of them soon, too! I'm gonna try and get down everything about all the heroes I can! They're all so cool." He stacks his notebooks to the side, smiles toothily at the camera (he has more than just his front teeth missing), and waves. *"I'll get back do you on that. Bye!"*

The screen goes black.

And then it comes back.

"So, um…I started middle school today."

Izuku is wearing a black school uniform, but there's dust and dirt on the sleeves and a couple ruffles and tears. As for Izuku's face, there's a cut on his cheek, along with a bruise, and he has a black eye.

"Yeah, um, it…it didn't go very well." Izuku keeps fiddling with his sleeves, wringing his hands together, looking away. *"I-I snuck in without Mom seeing me, but she's making dinner now and I can't pretend nothing happened forever…I just…"* He wipes his eyes, and it's only now that Toshinori notices how red they are. *"…I don't know why. I don't g-get it. I'm not a monster, am I? Everyone says I am…"*

Muffled, off-screen, Inko calls Izuku down for dinner. Izuku turns a few shades paler, and he flicks the camera off just as the tears begin

rolling down his face.

The next video takes on a totally different tone.

The entire left side of Izuku's face is bandaged, with the bandages traveling diagonally across the bridge of his nose, cheek, and around his head. There are bruises on his face, more of them than last time, and while he'd been actively trying to hold in his tears in the video before this, he's openly crying now. And judging by the red, swollen state of his eyes, he's been doing it for a while.

"S-So, K-Kacchan and I g-got into a fight," he chokes out, stammering around his tears. *"I just transferred schools today. I t-thought things were gonna be better. I thought things were finally changing. I-I thought I could finally make some real f-friends, but—"*

He stops, sucks in a shuddering breath, and breaks harder. He tries to wipe his eyes with the heels of his hands, but more tears replace them instantly.

"I don't know what I'm doing wrong," Izuku sobs, voice broken. *"I d-don't know how to change. I-I didn't ask for this Quirk, I-I didn't ask for —"* He chokes on a sob, drags in another breath. *"I didn't ask for anything. I just want it to stop."*

He goes silent, though the tears still fall and his sobs are still evident, and he squeezes his eyes shut and shakes his head feverishly.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'll—"

He reaches out and cuts the video. The screen goes black. A new one doesn't start.

"...That's the end of it," Inko says quietly, and her voice is hoarse. When Toshinori looks at her, her eyes glisten, but she doesn't meet his eyes. "That was the last thing he ever recorded on the camera. I found it on a shelf in his room about a week ago, and…"

Toshinori is speechless. He feels like he's been stabbed in the gut and punched in the face. Several times. Simultaneously.

"...Does Izuku...does he know you found this?" They aren't the words he wants to say, but they're the only ones he can force through his tight throat.

Inko draws in a shuddering breath, then nods. "I told him about it,

earlier. After I watched it. He said that—he said he doesn't mind. Me showing you, that is."

Toshinori is speechless again. He wants to say something, anything, but the words won't come.

Inko swallows thickly and lets out a long exhale. "You know, Toshinori-san...when I received the call from U.A., and they said they were sending over a teacher to discuss the dorms with me...I wanted to go ahead and say no to them. I wanted to hang up, lock the door, and never let Izuku go anywhere near U.A. again."

Toshinori can't even argue with it. Despite Toshinori's position as Izuku's teacher and mentor, it doesn't surprise him. He wouldn't even be able to convince Inko otherwise. He wouldn't have the heart.

"But...then I kept thinking about these videos," Inko rambles, tucking her hair behind her ear. "And I keep thinking about all the friends that Izuku's made at U.A., and I keep thinking about how he has teachers now who are doing their best to look after him, and his friends, they—they come over, they hang out, they make him laugh, and Izuku's never had that before. I can't take him *away* from that, but at the same time, I—I can't willingly thrust him into a life that puts him in danger."

In the hallway, Howler's tail keeps bumping Izuku's leg. Izuku leans against the wall, holding Howler back by his collar. Listening.

"I don't know what to tell you," Inko says, shaking her head feverishly. "I don't know whether to say yes or no. I'm torn. I'm *torn,* Toshinori-san. Which is why...when Izuku wakes up...I want to discuss it. The three of us."

"I'm awake."

Toshinori's head snaps around, and Inko looks toward the voice; it's Howler they see first, leading the way, but never going too far ahead Izuku, who shuffles out behind him with an air of defeat.

"Were you listening?" Inko asks, but by the tone of her voice and the hurt in her eyes, she already knows the answer. Izuku nods shakily and runs a single hand through his hair.

His white hair.

Toshinori doesn't think he'll ever get used to it. Even though he knows it and expects it, it'll never *not* hurt.

Inko looks at Izuku, then at Toshinori, then down at her hands. "Let's...let's all go to the dining room. I have tea on the stove. There's...there's a lot we need to talk about."

Izuku meets Toshinori's eyes for a moment, and they both nod at Inko.

The tea is already lukewarm when Toshinori finally sips it. He's sure it isn't as bitter as his taste buds make it out to be.

Inko and Toshinori are sitting across from each other at the table while Izuku sits on the side, looking down at his lap and stroking Howler's head near constantly. If there's one thing in this situation that Toshinori is thankful for, it's that dog's existence.

"...I...wasn't really planning on anyone watching those videos," Izuku says quietly. He's the first to speak up since they've moved to the table, and Toshinori and Inko's eyes are on him at once. He doesn't look at them. "When I recorded them...when I was little, I...they were just...at first they were for fun. And then they were for venting."

"Izuku..." Inko reaches out, but doesn't actually touch him, as badly as she may want to.

Izuku shakes his head, eyes still poised downwards. "I wanted to delete them. I almost did. A lot. I would've sooner just—y'know—pretended everything was okay. I would've sooner just acted like nothing was wrong and continued on that way. I didn't want to—t-to think about it, y'know? I never wanted to think about it. But, in the end, I...I didn't touch them. I kept the videos. Because it was *real.* And because it hurt."

Inko is silent. Toshinori has nothing to say. Izuku goes on.

"I think a part of me *wanted* someone to find the videos," Izuku says quietly. He's stopped petting Howler and now has his fists balled against his knees. "I never wanted to say any of it out loud, but—I actually dreamed of it, sometimes. Someone 'stumbling across the camera and figuring it out.' I thought of Bakugou doing it, too. I thought maybe he'd change if he saw what he was doing, but—I transferred schools before I could find out."

"Izuku, I'm sorry." Inko's voice is soft, but it cracks in several places.

She reaches out and settles a hand on Izuku's shoulder; he tenses, but doesn't pull away. "I'm so sorry."

"It's not…it's not your fault," Izuku says, shaking his head again. "It's just—I just—for a while, ever since I was little, I…I hated everything. I hated my Quirk. I hated that people hated me. I hated that I couldn't get rid of things that I didn't have control over in the first place. I hated Dad. I hated Bakugou. I hated myself."

Toshinori's chest is burning. He wants to say something, anything, but the words are lost in his throat before he can find them. All he can force out is, "Izuku, my boy—"

"But it's different now."

Toshinori stops, and Izuku finally lifts his head to look at them, each in turn. "Ever since I met Toshinori-san—ever since I started school at U.A.—things changed. I began to accept myself for the first time since I was five years old. The thought of All For One taking Dissociate away from me, I—it scared me. I didn't want to lose it. I would've gladly given it up years ago, but not now."

Toshinori keeps silent, and Izuku takes in a shuddering breath.

"…At first, I…I didn't know," he goes on, "whether or not I wanted to keep moving in this direction. But…now that I'm here, and now that I'm recovering, I…I want to continue. If you'll let me, Mom…I would like to continue at U.A."

Inko takes in a breath and holds it, shutting her eyes. She maintains that position for some time, contemplating; and then, she releases the breath shakily and opens her eyes.

"Izuku…I want you to be able to continue at U.A.," she says softly. "I want you to be able to keep chasing your dreams. But, right now, I…I'm torn, Izuku. I'm really torn. You know that."

Izuku looks down at his hands again. There's no tension. The only thing Toshinori can sense in the air is fear.

Except, then, it's like something slaps him in the face. It isn't Inko. It isn't anything physical. It's a memory of words. Nana's words. A reminder. His responsibility.

He pushes back his chair and rises to his feet. Izuku and Inko watch him, wide-eyed, and Toshinori puts it out of his mind and bows lowly.

The tip of his nose almost touches the wooden surface of the dining table.

“I’m sorry,” he says earnestly. “I’m sorry. To both of you. Inko, if you will allow me...I would like to continue to guide your son at U.A. and help him achieve his goal. I swear, I’ll protect him, I’ll do whatever it takes to make sure he’s safe, and if anything else comes up, if the villains try anything, I’ll do everything in my power to ensure nothing happens to him, ever again.”

Izuku’s chair scrapes the ground as he leaps to his feet. “Toshinori-san —”

“Izuku. Please.”

Izuku’s teeth snap together, and when Toshinori finally lifts his head to meet his student’s eyes, he sees tears. Inko rises to her feet as well, though much more reserved. Unsure.

“...Toshinori-san... *All Might...”* Inko swallows thickly, but maintains eye contact. “...I know how much Izuku means to you, and I know how much you mean to him. I…” She shuts her eyes again, inhales, exhales. “...I don’t like it. I’ll never like it. But Izuku has a better life at U.A. now than he’s ever had, and...I can’t take that away from him.”

Izuku whirls around to stare at her. “S-So—you mean—”

Inko nods, though she clasps her hands together and bows her forehead against them. “Just, please, Izuku...please. Don’t—don’t do anything reckless. Please.”

Izuku drops his hands down to his sides. Howler bumps his palm with his snout, and Izuku pats him on the head lightly.

“...Okay,” Izuku says, nodding. “I won’t make you worry, Mom.”

“I’m going to worry no matter what,” Inko laments, wiping her eyes with the backs of her hands. When she lowers her arms, it reveals the small smile on her face “But that’s what I get for having a hero for a son, right?”

Izuku returns the weak smile, and Toshinori feels a rush of breath leave him in an instant. It’s going to be a long road from here on out —but at least, now, he knows there *is* a road.

Toshinori is surprised when Izuku asks if they could take a walk down the street before Toshinori took off, but in hindsight, he doesn't know why he hadn't expected it. There's a lot Toshinori doesn't know, a lot Izuku hasn't told him; maybe now's when he wants to let some of that out.

It scares him.

"...Your mother is a pretty amazing person," Toshinori says, lifting his head and gazing at the sunset as he and Izuku hike down the sidewalk. Howler's name tags jingle as he trots by Izuku's side, and Izuku nods stiffly, adjusting his hold on Howler's leash.

"She is," Izuku says, without looking at him. "I'm a little surprised she was okay with me staying at U.A., though. I was...I was expecting more of a fight."

Toshinori can't argue with that. He'd be lying if he said he wasn't vaguely terrified of the woman. Something about her aura can be genuinely frightening sometimes.

"So...about...about the videos…"

Toshinori looks at Izuku, who kicks a stone down the sidewalk without returning the gesture.

"You...probably think less of me now, don't you?"

"No, not at all," Toshinori says at once, shaking his head. "It isn't that, my boy. I was just surprised, is all. I'd known bits and pieces of your childhood, but...I never realized it was that bad."

Izuku exhales sharply through his nose and shakes his head. "It's not your fault. I never told you. Either way, you know now, so...it just...kind of takes a weight off my shoulders, I guess?" They catch up with the stone, and Izuku kicks it again. It flies down the sidewalk ahead of them. "Yeah. That's what it is."

Toshinori doesn't know what else to say. "...Izuku...I'm really sorry."

Izuku stops mid-step, one foot still in the air, and Toshinori turns back to look. Izuku tilts his head at him, puzzled. "What for?"

Izuku's white hair is ruffled by the cool, gentle breeze. Toshinori takes in a long breath. "I wasn't the mentor you needed," he says, shaking his head. "I wasn't even the hero you needed. When it came down to

it, when you needed me the most...I failed you."

Izuku's brows furrow even further. "But...you *were* there? At Kamino, you beat All For One—"

Toshinori reaches out and settles a hand on Izuku's shoulder. He feels the boy stiffen beneath him, and his first instinct says to pull away, but he doesn't. Izuku isn't tense for long, but the look on his face has changed.

"Just now," Toshinori says, looking him in the eyes. "What did you think of?"

Izuku's expression is blank. "I…Toshinori-san, I—I'm—"

Toshinori lifts his hand from Izuku's shoulder and brushes his white bangs out of his face. There's still green, on the tips of his hair, but that's it. That's all that's left of his hair's natural color.

The words spill out before he can stop himself or think twice.

"My boy...what did they *do* to you?"

Something flickers in Izuku's eyes for the briefest of moments, and it's gone long before Toshinori can figure out what it is. Izuku lowers his head, and Howler whines softly and nuzzles his hand again.

"...He told me to give him One For All," Izuku says simply, but his voice wavers. "And I said no."

These words are almost scarier than a proper explanation, because they lend themselves to literally *anything.* There's so much Toshinori doesn't understand, there's so much he doesn't know.

"Izuku…" Toshinori's throat is tight. His chest burns. "You don't have to tell me now. And you don't have to tell me anytime soon. But you don't have to be afraid of me. You don't have to be afraid to tell me what happened to you. Whatever they did, it wasn't your fault. You don't have to be ashamed."

Izuku looks up at him, but his demeanor is less like the confident, sarcastic pun-lover and more like a scared child looking up at their angry parent. It hurts.

"...I know." Izuku wipes his eyes and nods shakily. "I know, Toshinori-san, I know, it's just—I'm not ashamed of it, I'm not, I'm just—I'm

scared of reliving it. I don't want to relive it, I don't want to think about it, I-I don't—I don't want to go back to it. I can't."

Toshinori swallows back his tears and holds out an arm. Izuku stares at him for a long moment, then shuffles forward and bumps his forehead against Toshinori's chest. Toshinori closes the arm around Izuku's shoulders, loosely in case he wants to pull away, and Izuku responds by wrapping his arms around Toshinori's waist and squeezing tightly.

Izuku doesn't cry, but his breath comes in shaky inhales and exhales, and Toshinori shuts his eyes and waits out for as long as it lasts.

It ends sooner than he thought it would, with Izuku pulling back out of his arms, brushing his fingers under his eyes. Howler is sitting there, waiting patiently, and Izuku pats him on the head again with an incoherent murmur.

"T-Thanks," Izuku says, shaking his head. "Sorry, I—I just—"

"You don't need to apologize to me," Toshinori says, smiling and hoping it looks sincere and not pained. "You've done nothing that warrants an apology."

Izuku actually smiles at him, faintly, and Toshinori counts that alone as a huge victory.

And then his phone rings.

Izuku jumps, Howler's head cocks to one side, and Toshinori fumbles to pull his phone out of his pocket and silence it. "Sorry, I thought I'd turned it off—"

As he's making to silence it, he gets a glance at the caller ID.

Naomasa Tsukauchi

Toshinori's heart sinks to his stomach.

"Who is it?" Izuku asks, wringing his hands together.

"Naomasa," Toshinori answers, dread pooling in his gut. "My boy, I'm sorry, but—"

"No, take it, it's fine," Izuku says at once, and Toshinori swipes his thumb across the screen and holds the device against his ear.

“Tsukauchi?”

“Toshinori?” Naomasa’s voice carries a sense of grave urgency. *“That’s you, isn’t it?”*

“Yeah, it’s me.” (Howler is trying to get Izuku to cheer up, knocking his head against the backs of his legs encouragingly.) “What is it?”

“Ragdoll woke up about an hour ago. She wants to give her testimony. Right now.”

Acid springs into Toshinori’s throat. He catches Izuku eyeing him, but can’t respond. “Right *now?”*

“She’s pretty urgent,” Naomasa says, voice wavering. *“She asked that you’d be here, along with myself and a few others from the police force. The doctor is going to sit in and listen to bits and pieces of it on Midoriya’s behalf.”*

His head is *spinning.* “What time do you need me down there?”

“Right now, if you can. As soon as you can get here.”

Toshinori glances at Izuku for a moment, then refocuses his attention. “Alright, I’m on my way. I’ll be there soon.”

“Right, bye.”

Naomasa hangs up, and Toshinori stuffs his phone into his pocket.

“What is it?” Izuku asks, ignoring Howler and stepping forward. “What did he say?”

“Ragdoll woke up,” Toshinori answers immediately.

Izuku’s eyes blow wide. “She—she’s awake?”

Toshinori nods. “She wants to give her testimony, about what happened at Kamino. I need to be there to listen.”

“Oh…” Izuku bites his lip for a long moment, then nods shakily. “Y-Yeah, you should get down there. Good luck.”

“Thank you.” Toshinori doesn’t really know what to do with himself right now, despite his experience as a hero. “I’m sorry to run, Izuku, but—”

“It’s okay, it’s important,” Izuku says, shaking his head. “Go, it’s okay.”

Toshinori nods, then turns away—but he doesn’t get two steps before —

“W-Wait, Toshinori-san.”

Izuku reaches out, fingers curling around Toshinori’s wrist, and Toshinori looks back at him over his shoulder. Izuku swallows hard, but meets his eyes regardless.

“Can I go?” Izuku inquires softly, voice small. “I-I don’t want to listen, I *won’t* listen, but—I haven’t seen Ragdoll since—” He cuts off, then shakes his head feverishly. “I just—I just want to see her. Please.”

Toshinori doesn’t even have to think about it. “Alright,” he says, nodding. “Alright, just, text your mother and let her know. I’ll ask Naomasa when we get there. We need to move.”

Izuku nods readily, and they start down the sidewalk again together, with Howler trotting at Izuku’s side.

Chapter End Notes

> guys you're all so amazing thank you so much for being patient. (also the chapter title might change bc this doesn't feel 100% right to me so hfkgjdlffg, sorry about that.) thanks for being so patient with me you guys!! all your words of encouragements means the world to me. Thank you :D

The World Was Wide Enough

Chapter Summary

"The World Was Wide Enough" from Hamilton

“Death doesn’t discriminate between the sinners and the saints,
It takes and it takes and it takes,
History obliterates, in every picture it paints,
It paints me and all my mistakes.
I survived, but I paid for it.
Now I’m the villain in your history,
I was too young and blind to see,
I should’ve known.
I should’ve known the world was wide enough for both him and me.
The world was wide enough, for both him and me.”

Chapter Notes

I didn't respond to comments this time around, I know, but you guys you're all so sweet and amazing and encouraging and I love you all. So much. Thank you for being so patient and supportive of me and my writings. It's really special and it means the *world* to me.

Thanks again, and before we begin, art!!

doesromandoart

lionadaughterofposeidon

raven-dreaming (Warning for blood/scarring)

chiangyorange (Warning for blood/injury)

Thank you all SO MUCH!! Enjoy the chapter!

Izuku has to take two steps for every one of Toshinori’s. The man’s pace is brisk and Izuku is exhausted, but mounting fear and anticipation keep him moving despite it. He can’t stop wringing his hands together; cold sweat rolls down the back of his neck; and even on the train, when he finally has the chance to catch his breath, he can’t sit still. Howler is a comforting weight against the side of his leg, but he can’t even bring himself to pat his head.

"...You look sick," Toshinori says, brows drawn in concern. Izuku glances up at him from where they're seated on the train, then averts his gaze and shakes his head. "Are you quite certain you're okay?"

"I'm fine," he says, and he hopes it isn't a lie. He doesn't know himself. He can't tell. "I'm just—I-I'm just a little anxious."

"A *little?"* Toshinori's face stays the same. "My boy, if you aren't up to it, it's better not to try. I'd understand if you weren't ready —"

Izuku had began shaking his head, and Toshinori trails off as a result. "I'm fine," he says again, slightly more confident this time. "I really want to see her again, it's—it's fine."

Toshinori doesn't look convinced, and he has every reason not to be, but he nods either way without a fight, and the train speeds onwards.

If Izuku thought the train ride had been bad, the walk up the steps and into the hospital is even worse. Naomasa is waiting for them at the receptionist desk; he greets Toshinori formally, and Izuku, with a small, confused smile.

Toshinori opens his mouth to explain, but Izuku beats him to it. "I want to see Ragdoll," Izuku tells him. "I don't want to stay and listen to everything else, I just want to see her."

Naomasa and Toshinori exchange glances, but when the officer turns back to him, his smile is slightly brighter. And maybe a bit sad. "Of course," he says, nodding. "I'm sure the doctor wouldn't mind. We've already arranged for several people to speak with Ragdoll, so I don't think one more makes a difference."

He gestures for them to follow, and Toshinori and Izuku trail behind them as he leads them down the hall towards what Izuku can only assume is Ragdoll's room.

He knows they're there the moment he sees two police officers standing outside one of the rooms. They nod in acknowledgement when they see Naomasa, who nods back respectfully and grabs ahold of the doorknob. Izuku is shaking again, heart in his throat. Toshinori's hand touches his shoulder for a moment.

Naomasa turns the knob and pushes the door open.

Ragdoll is sitting up on the bed, attached with several wires and tubes,

but her head whips around when she hears the door, and her eyes lock with Izuku's. Her face is pale, her hair seems duller than usual, but she's awake and she's alive and there are tears in her eyes—

Izuku tears across the room, ignoring Toshinori, ignoring Naomasa, ignoring the doctor. Ragdoll opens her arms to receive him, and Izuku dives right into them. His eyes burn. His shoulders tremble. His breath gets stuck on the sobs in his throat. He hugs her as tight as he can, and then tighter. She does the same, completely enveloping him into her arms. He can feel her tears against his scalp.

"I'm so glad you're safe," she weeps quietly, squeezing him tighter. "I'm—I'm so glad you're *safe—"*

"I'm sorry," Izuku chokes out, tears falling freely. He couldn't stop them if he tried. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm *so sorry—"*

He feels her shake her head feverishly. "No, no, it's okay. It's okay. It's over now. We're both okay. It wasn't your fault. None of what happened was your fault."

It doesn't really help, but just the fact that he's able to be here and hug her like this is all he really wants. The last time he'd seen her, she'd been a broken heap on the floor, eyes wide and unseeing. Above all, he's glad she's okay. That's really the bulk of this.

Ragdoll pulls away before he's ready to let go, and she smiles tearfully and settles her hands on his shoulders. "There, see?" She laughs softly and brushes his tears away with one hand, then her tears with the other. "We're gonna be okay."

Izuku laughs back equally shakily, feeling a bit hysteric, and he nods.

…

After that, Izuku is waiting outside with Howler, and Toshinori, Naomasa, and the doctor—as well as Mandalay and Pixiebob—are left with Ragdoll. Toshinori takes a seat in the background while Naomasa and the doctor move closer. Mandalay and Pixiebob stand by Ragdoll's bed, looking uncomfortable but at the same time, helpless as to what to do.

Ragdoll is the first amongst them to speak, lifting her head. "Does Izuku know?" she asks, looking at Naomasa and the doctor specifically. "Does he know what we're talking about?"

Naomasa glances at Toshinori, who nods heavily. “He does,” Toshinori answers, folding his hands loosely. “I explained what we were doing. He didn’t have any objections.”

Ragdoll bites her lip and looks down at her hands. “...I don’t know the whole story,” she says. Her voice breaks near the end. “I was unconscious for the first part of it and the last part of it. I don’t know everything they did to him. All I know is…”

“It’s alright,” Naomasa says, shaking his head gently. “You don’t have to know everything. Just, tell us what you know.”

Ragdoll takes in another shaky breath, then nods feverishly. “R-Right. Okay. It—It started in a cell. I woke up when they brought Izuku in…”

When it’s all said and done, there are silent tears slipping down Ragdoll’s face, and Toshinori’s hands are shaking. The doctor finishes recounting certain things on his clipboard, then rises to his feet and shoos Toshinori and Naomasa out. The last thing Toshinori sees before closing the door is Ragdoll as she turns to embrace Mandalay.

Naomasa nudges him on the arm, which brings him back to reality just enough to move. His feet carry him numbly, like he’s passenger instead of driver, and Naomasa flanks him silently.

They reach the waiting room. Izuku perks up the second he sees them and springs to his feet, Howler following his lead. He meets Toshinori’s eyes. They hold each other’s gazes.

And then, numbly, Toshinori starts forward and yanks the boy into his arms.

Izuku was expecting it, and he returns the embrace wholeheartedly. Howler doesn’t interfere. Neither does Naomasa. Now that Toshinori *knows,* now that he *understands,* the weight of it is hitting him harder than ever. Every ounce of helplessness and uselessness he’d ever felt redoubles and pounds at his heart like a sledgehammer. And when Izuku’s shoulders shake, *that* redoubles, too.

“I’m sorry,” Toshinori murmurs, voice breaking. “I’m sorry, Izuku. I’m sorry I didn’t —I’m sorry I wasn’t *there—”*

Izuku shakes his head, but doesn’t answer verbally or loosen his grip.

Izuku has no idea how much Ragdoll told them, but judging by Toshinori's immediate reaction, it'd been enough. They know about the shocks. They know about her Quirk. They know what he saw. They don't know *his* side of it, but Ragdoll's story gives the basic gist of everything.

He puts it out of his mind for the time being by packing his things. Tomorrow he'll set out for the dormitory with his classmates. Tomorrow he'll leave his childhood home behind and race for the future.

Tonight, though, he needs to distract himself, and he doesn't have any more voices in his head to help with this. Now that they're gone, he misses them. He hadn't realized how big a part of him the ex-holders had become. As happy as he is that they've found their peace and they've moved on, a part of him wants them back. A *big* part of him.

By the time the sun begins to set, he feels empty. Like a physical part of him had been viciously torn from his chest. He wants them back. He wants *someone.*

Howler's tongue strikes him across the face, and Izuku laughs softly and cards his fingers through Howler's thick coat. "You gonna come with me to U.A., huh, boy?"

Howler licks him again, and Izuku smiles softly and gets to his feet. He nudges his suitcase closed with his foot, then zips it and sets it against the wall. *Most* everything has been packed now. There are a few more things he needs to gather, but he can do that tomorrow before the bus comes to pick everything up. He'll have time. For now, he's drained and exhausted.

He sits down on the edge of the bed, pats the spot beside him to let Howler know it's okay, and reaches over and grabs his phone while Howler curls up at his side and flops his head across Izuku's lap. Izuku strokes his fur with one hand and sends a message with the other.

[MESSAGING "SHOUTO"]

[Midoriya Izuku]
Hey, Thermostat. You ready for tomorrow?

[Shouto]
Just about. Got another suitcase to pack but it shouldn't take very long. I'm stopping for the night. You?

[Midoriya Izuku]
Yeah same. I'm kind of nervous but mostly excited.

[Shouto]
Right, me too.
How's it going aside from that?

Izuku flops backwards on his bed and holds his phone above him while he answers.

[Midoriya Izuku]
I'm…not doing too great, actually.
After the whole Kamino thing, I guess…I just feel kind of alone? I'm missing 7 voices in my head right now. It's weird that they aren't there.

[Shouto]
Right…yeah…can't imagine. That's pretty crazy actually.
You gonna be okay tonight?

[Midoriya Izuku]
I'm sure I'll be okay once I fall asleep.

[Shouto]
So, a no, then.

[Midoriya Izuku]
I have no idea.
Wish I had some lipstick. For my head.

[Shouto]
…I'm sorry?

[Midoriya Izuku]
So I can makeup my mind.

[Shouto]
…
I'm sorry I asked.
Seriously though, and don't kid around, are you going to be okay?

[Midoriya Izuku]
I can't kid around, I'm a teenager.

[Shouto]

Izuku please I'm being serious

[Midoriya Izuku]
I know, I know. Sorry.
It's just…I don't know.

[Shouto]
I get it. It's a coping method.
You're not okay.

[Midoriya Izuku]
There's a big probability that I'm not.

[Shouto]
Do you need me to come over?

[Midoriya Izuku]
No, I don't think so. I'll see you tomorrow, anyway, so…

[Shouto]
But you need someone tonight.
Tomorrow will be too late.

[Midoriya Izuku]
Shouto, you don't have to.

[Shouto]
I'm a baker now, Izuku.

[Midoriya Izuku]
What?

[Shouto]
In other words, I *knead* to.

[Midoriya Izuku]
im

[Shouto]
See you in a few minutes

[Midoriya Izuku]
WAIT
OY
COME BACK
WHAT ARE YOU DOING

TODOROKI
O Y
YOU'D BETTER NOT SHOW UP AT THE FRONT DOOR

[Shouto]
Ok

[Midoriya Izuku]
...WAIT
DON'T COME THROUGH THE BACK DOOR EITHER

[Shouto]
Ok

[Midoriya Izuku]
I am so suspicious of you right now.

[Shouto]
Ok

Izuku sets his phone down when Shouto doesn't say anything else, and he drapes an arm across his face and closes his eyes. Howler rests his head on Izuku's chest, and Izuku strokes his fur gently with the opposite hand.

For a while, there's silence.

And then, something makes a gentle *tap* on Izuku's bedroom window.

He lowers his arm down from his face, wide-eyed. Howler's ears twitch. They wait.

Tap.

Izuku sits up, listening.

Tap.

Izuku swings himself off the bed and jogs over to the window, pursued by Howler. He cups his hands around his face and presses his nose against the glass. When he can't see anything, he throws open the window and looks out.

From the ground level of the apartment complex, Shouto waves at him.

Izuku is beside himself, and he cups his hands around his mouth and

shouts, “Are you seriously throwing pebbles at my window!?”

Shouto frowns back up at him. “I’m trying to rock your world.”

“WHAT HAVE YOU BECOME!?”

Shouto shrugs.

“You have a key!” Izuku hollers down. “Use that! Stop throwing rocks!”

Without waiting for a response, he shuts the window and turns away. He’s just about to leave his room so he can meet Shouto at the front door, but that’s when he hears a metallic *clang!* against the window.

He stops, one foot still in the air.

And then he spins around, throws open the window once again, and yells, *“Did you just throw your key at the window!?”*

“It’s okay, I found it,” Shouto says, picking something up off the ground and straightening up. He looks upwards at Izuku as though seeing him for the first time. “Hi.”

“Urgh!” Izuku shuts the window, spins around, and races for the front door. He swings it open just as Shouto steps onto the porch.

“What’s with you and the jokes?” Izuku asks, unsure of whether to be upset or elated.

Shouto blinks at him twice. “I thought you liked jokes.”

“I *do,”* (Izuku steps out of the doorway; Shouto steps inside), “I just wasn’t expecting them from you.” He shuts and locks the door, then turns to Shouto. “How did you get here so fast?”

Shouto’s face doesn’t change. “I ran.”

“You live on the *other side of the city,* Thermostat, *how?”*

“I ran really fast. Hi, Howler.”

Howler bumps his nose against Shouto’s knees, and Izuku rolls his eyes and pinches the bridge of his nose while Shouto bends down to pet him.

“Fine, you win this time,” Izuku says, “but this is the only time.”

Shouto straightens up again, and even though Izuku is still kind of exasperated, he's mostly relieved. Even if Shouto doesn't stay for very long, at least for a little while, he doesn't have to be alone.

Now they're laying on Izuku's bed, staring up at the ceiling with Howler curled happily between them. There's something very personal and natural about scenarios like this that make Izuku feel like maybe everything's going to be okay after all.

"...So." Shouto's voice is small in the darkness. "No jokes this time, Izuku. What's upsetting you?"

Izuku swallows hard. Shouto knows more about him than anyone else in his class, and he's opened up to Shouto about most everything. He knows about One For All. He knows about the ex-holders. He knows about Izuku's deepest, darkest memories and secrets. Things he hasn't even told Toshinori or Mom.

But it's still hard to say it. Even after all that, he finds himself stumbling.

"...Ragdoll gave her testimony today," Izuku says quietly. "At the hospital. She told everyone her side of what happened at Kamino."

It's impossible to read Shouto's reaction. "Go on. I'm listening."

"I-I guess it's...hard," Izuku says, biting his lip, "knowing that Toshinori knows. We haven't actually... *talked* about it. He looked kind of like he was in shock after he heard…"

Shouto stays quiet, so Izuku goes on.

"...I just...they still don't know everything. And I kind of just want to say it and get it over with."

"You mean, like...your testimony?"

"...Yeah."

Shouto doesn't say anything for a long while. "I mean...if you're ready to share it, then...maybe you should. Like you said, just get it over with so you never have to think about it again. On the other hand, if you aren't ready—"

"That's the thing, though. I won't be *more* ready next week, next year —even next decade. I don't think I'll ever actually be 'ready' to share.

Which is why I just…I just wanna say it. I just wanna spit it out there and be done with it."

Shouto sighs, but his hand finds Izuku's over Howler's fur, and Izuku squeezes his fingers. His wrists are still bandaged.

"If you want to do it," he says, "then I'll be there to help you deal with the aftermath."

Izuku swallows back the sob that threatens to escape him. He nods. "Thank you. That means the world, you have no idea."

Shouto doesn't respond, only holds Izuku's hand tighter. Izuku returns the gesture.

Howler seems the most excited out of all of them, bouncing around Izuku happily while he and his classmates stand before the towering Heights Alliance—U.A.'s brand new student dormitory.

"It's *massive!"* Kirishima blurts, wide-eyed. *"Holy crap,* and they did all this between Kamino and now!?"

"It's U.A., though," Sero says, looking up at the towering structure, "so I have a hard time being surprised by stuff like this anymore."

Izuku catches Shouto side-eyeing him, but waves his hand and smiles reassuringly—or, he tries to. Shouto doesn't *seem* completely convinced, but he doesn't press further. He doesn't even ask.

Aizawa gives the announcement before the group, but something seems a bit off about him. He doesn't chastise the others for venturing out to rescue Izuku; he doesn't even mention it, as though the event hadn't even happened, and aside from that, he keeps glancing Izuku's way as he explains the accommodations. It puts Izuku further on edge.

"Your things have already been taken to your assigned rooms," Aizawa says, spinning on his heel and starting toward the massive double doors leading inside. "Come with me and I'll give you a basic rundown of the place."

Everyone exchanges glances, having caught wind of an uncomfortable tone, but they follow Aizawa anyway. Bakugou trails the end of the group silently, alone, which doesn't seem quite right, but Izuku doesn't comment. He hasn't spoken a word to Bakugou ever since the training camp and he really doesn't want to change that right now.

With the exception of Izuku's door, which has a dog-door built in for Howler, the rooms are built and structured exactly the same way. When Aizawa gives out floors and rooms, Izuku is elated when he hears he Shouto and Iida will all be on a floor together. It's a small thing, and Izuku wouldn't mind getting put with anyone, but being able to be with his closest friends is extra special.

Before Izuku can be too happy with those arrangements, Aizawa announces that Kaminari, Aoyama and Tokoyami will be on the top floor—the farthest floor from Izuku's.

Izuku doesn't know what it is exactly that makes it obvious. Maybe it's the tone of Aizawa's voice. Maybe it's just Kaminari's name. But it all becomes very clear: they intentionally separated Izuku and Kaminari.

They know.

Kaminari seems clueless as ever, of course, but Aizawa is the farthest thing from "clueless" that there is. It wasn't change. It wasn't an accident. Izuku and Kaminari had been purposefully set apart from each other.

Something about that makes Izuku feel distinctly like he's been punched in the gut.

It takes longer than expected for everyone to unpack and get settled in their new accommodations. Izuku is hanging up posters for the majority of the time, and then after that he's getting Howler setted, setting his leash and vest on the bedside table for the time being and spreading out several dog blankets on the floor. Howler lies on them immediately, but his tail thumps the ground eagerly and he keeps his head raised.

Once Izuku is finished unpacking (or, at least, finished with whatever he wants to do tonight), he whistles to Howler and heads to the common room.

Most everyone else is already there, draped over couches or, in some cases, lying on the floor. They look like they'd just fought a vicious battle and barely escaped with their lives.

"Man, that was exhausting," Ashido moans, sinking against the back of the couch, arms splayed beside her. "Who knew decorating rooms could be so draining. *Fun,* of course, but *draining."*

“I know what you mean,” Jirou comments, sitting beside her on the couch. Tsuyu and Uraraka are on the same couch with them, and across from them, Satou, Tokoyami, Izuku, and Shouto sit. Everyone else is either on the floor or in the kitchen preparing tea. “That took way longer than I thought it would.”

“Still, though,” Satou says, putting a hand to his chin, “it *is* nice that we went ahead and got it out of the way. We have a half-day at school tomorrow, I think, but still. The more we can get done right away, the better.”

“Indeed.” Iida returns from the kitchen with a tray of tea. Uraraka, Tsuyu, and Hagakure reach for it first; once they have theirs, Iida offers some to the other couch, and soon, after a couple more back and forth trips, everyone is sipping tea.

“Ahhh, this is nice,” Kirishima breathes, then inhales the steam longly and exhales afterwards. “Just sitting back and chilling out. This is fantastic.”

“It sure is,” Uraraka answers, nodding. “This is really nice, being in a dorm together. It’s kind of like we’re all one big family.”

Izuku can’t help but smile. “It *is* nice,” he agrees, nodding and sipping at his tea. “It’s...it’s real nice.”

“Well, decorating took *forever,”* Ashido complains again, though she sits forward a bit. “How did it go for you, Ochako-chan?”

Uraraka launches into it, and soon everyone is talking about their experiences decorating their dorms. Izuku watches their exchanges, content to listen without adding anything —and then, something taps his shoulder from behind.

It doesn’t startle him too badly, and he turns, just in time to watch Bakugou spin on his heel away from him.

“When everyone’s gone to bed, meet me outside. I wanna talk.”

Izuku blinks several times, unsure of whether he’d heard right. One look at Shouto’s face tells him that he had.

“What was that about?” Shouto questions, frowning deeply. His voice is just loud enough for Izuku to hear over the rest of the chatter, but low enough for *just* Izuku to hear. “What do you think he wants?”

“I don’t know,” Izuku admits, glancing over his shoulder again. Bakugou is on the other side of the room now, heading for the kitchen. “Considering it’s…well, *him,* I guess it really could be anything…”

Shouto nods stiffly.

Iida, who apparently caught whiff of the conversation, leans over. “Excuse me for interrupting,” he says; Shouto and Izuku both look at him, “but you are under no obligation to talk to Bakugou if he makes you uncomfortable, Midoriya.”

“I-It’s not…it’s not that,” Izuku says, though he’s unsure of whether or not he’s right. “I just…he’s been kind of weird ever since *then,* don’t you think? Even if I don’t really *want* to talk to him, I…I kind of want to see what’s the matter.”

Shouto and Iida look at each other, then back at him. “Only if you’re sure,” Iida says at long last, swirling his teacup around. “And be sure to decline if you change your mind.”

“I will,” Izuku says, and they drop the conversation and instead join in with the girls in discussing their dorm rooms.

The lights go out. Everyone has bid each other goodnight. The night is cool and the stars are bright. A couple sensor-activated lights shine their way.

Izuku and Bakugou didn’t go very far —just outside the dormitory, actually. Far enough to be out of earshot, but not too far. Bakugou’s back is to him, and Izuku faces him directly, heart pounding, thoughts racing.

The silence grows more and more uncomfortable with every passing second, and eventually, Izuku decides to break it. “So, Bakugou…” Izuku swallows back the lump in his throat. “What do you wanna talk about?”

Bakugou doesn’t look at him for the longest moment. “…Why didn’t you give up, Deku?”

Izuku sets his jaw. “What?”

Bakugou turns to him fully. The look on his face is impossible to read. “You heard me. After everyone—after *I* told you that your Quirk

belonged to a villain, after I told you to give it up, after I made you transfer schools…why didn't you *give up?"*

Izuku bites his lip. "I don't know what kind of question that is," he says, shaking his head. "What do you want me to say, Bakugou? Giving up was never an option for me, never. Even if I thought about it, I never—"

"But *why didn't you?"* Bakugou *snaps,* tone rising, and Izuku balls his fists subconsciously at his sides, just in case. "'Never an option,' 'don't know what kind of question that is'…what the hell does that even mean?"

"I-I don't get it—"

"Why didn't you give up even when they kidnapped you, huh?"

Izuku stops. Millions of images come rushing back at him at once, images he wishes he didn't have. Memories he wishes he could erase. "I-I—Bakugou—"

"Anyone else would have given up!" Bakugou yells now, and sparks actually fly from his fists. "Anyone else would have given up a *long* time ago, but *you didn't!* Why is that!?"

"B-Bakugou—"

"Stop stuttering and answer the damn question!"

Bakugou lunges at him. Izuku's shoulder blades hit the wall of Heights Alliance. His eyes screw shut on their own. His heart skips a beat. His spirit lurches, and then suddenly, his body hits the ground.

He'd forgotten he could do that, actually. Ever since the ex-holders' final goodbye, he'd forgotten the proper nature of his Quirk.

Even as a spirit, he keeps his eyes shut, bracing himself. His body is beneath him, unmoving. He hears a skid, smells smoke and dust. He hears crackles as Bakugou's sparks fly.

But there's no impact. Just when he's expecting Bakugou to finally hit him, everything goes silent. Everything goes still.

Slowly, he cracks his eyes open. Bakugou stands a little ways in front of him, hand outstretched until his fingers nearly touch his face—his spirit's face. His physical body is in a crumpled heap beneath him.

Bakugou is breathing hard, trembling all over, but his eyes are wide. Izuku doesn't think he's ever seen such a disoriented, shocked look on Bakugou's face before.

"Again…" Bakugou steps backwards, and Izuku rejoins his physical form and rises to his feet slowly, aching and covered in dust. "Again...why the *hell…"*

Izuku gets his breath back and straightens up fully. "Bakugou—"

Bakugou ignores him. His breathing goes ragged. He's staring down at his palms.

"What the *hell is wrong with me!?"* Bakugou explodes, firing off two explosions at the ground on either side of them. Izuku flinches, but is unharmed. "Why do I keep doing this, huh!? *Why!?"*

"B-Bakugou, calm down," Izuku says, holding out his hands to him. "You said we wanted to talk. Let's talk. Just don't—"

"I'm a *villain,* Deku!" Bakugou roars unexpectedly, snapping his head towards him. "The League tried kidnapping me because they thought I'd make a *good villain!* Why is it like that, huh!? What the hell did I do!? How the hell do I—" He stops, buries his face in his hands. His fingers yank at his bangs. His breaths come in fast and hard. "How the *hell do I fix this!?"*

Izuku doesn't know what to say. He feels like he's being physically slammed by each word. "Bakugou—"

"Why did you save me?" Bakugou interrupts loudly. His eyes are narrowed, but there's a desperation and a fear in his gaze that hadn't been there a second ago. "I was a *villain* to you, Deku! I treated you like *shit,* and you *still* —damn it, *damn it, why!?"*

He stumbles backwards, shoulders shaking, hands around his face. When he raises his eyes again, he doesn't look angry anymore. He looks genuinely distressed.

"You saved me with the same damn Quirk that I *ridiculed* you for! *Why did you save me after the hell I put you through!?"*

Something snaps, and suddenly Izuku can't take it anymore.

"I didn't want to!" he yells, fists balled at his sides. "I didn't *want to,* Bakugou!"

“Then *why the hell did you!?”*

“I *don’t know!”* Izuku takes in a ragged breath through his gritted teeth. “I don’t *know,* okay!? I didn’t *want to,* but I saw your eyes, and I couldn’t just *leave you there!* My body moved on its own. I saved you before I even realized what I was doing!”

“Don’t give me that crap! Tell me *why!”*

“I had to!”

“No you *didn’t!”*

“Yes, I *did!”*

Bakugou looks like he wants to say something else, but he stops at the last second. So does Izuku. For a while, they do nothing but breathe heavily and stare at each other. Sweat rolls down the back of Izuku’s neck despite the cool night.

“…I don’t know why,” Izuku says quietly, stumbling back until his shoulder blades hit the side of a building. He leans against it heavily and drags a hand over his face. “I don’t know why I saved you, Bakugou. I really don’t. I just—the alternative meant letting you get taken away, and that wasn’t something I was okay with. I would’ve done it for anyone. I didn’t single you out specifically. You’re not special. I just—I’m not going to lie about it. A part of me didn’t want to. *Most* of me didn’t want to.”

Bakugou’s face doesn’t change. His teeth are barred. “But you did.”

Izuku takes in a breath and says, hoarsely, “What do you want me to say?”

Bakugou doesn’t respond. For the longest of times, and then longer, the silence stretches.

“…It’s my fault,” Bakugou says flatly. “It’s my fault, that’s what. I want you to tell me that it’s *my fault.”*

Izuku doesn’t say anything.

“You’re not stupid enough to deny it,” Bakugou snaps, stumbling back. “It’s my fault the villains look at me like that. It’s my fault they think I’d be a nice addition to their little ‘family.’ Every time I look for someone else to blame I’m always coming back around to myself and I

don't know what the hell I'm supposed to do about it."

It's weird, being able to talk to Bakugou like this instead of just screaming at him. Izuku straightens up, and Bakugou grits his teeth and rakes a hand through his hair.

"I don't know what the hell to say," Bakugou grinds out, shaking his head. "I don't know what to say, I don't know what to do, I don't know how to *fix this.* Ever since talking with that Muscular bastard in Tartarus, I've been looking for someone to blame. But in the end it's all my fault. Even what happened to you was my fault. It's *all my damn fault."*

Izuku can't find his words.

"And I know you won't forgive me," Bakugou goes on, "and I know that that's my fault, too. I made it so you couldn't forgive me. That's my fault. You hate me, right? You hate me and I hate you, and you know what? *That's my frickin' fault, too, Deku."*

"Bakugou—"

"No, don't say anything, don't you *dare say a damn thing.* I know how you are. You can't even look me in the eyes and say it to my face. I always loved blaming you for everything but it's because of *me* that things turned out like this. You can't even forgive me. And I don't expect you to."

Izuku has no idea what to say. A couple words come to mind, but none of them stand out. None of them matter. Bakugou is finally talking to him like they're equals. He's finally realizing what he's been doing. He's finally coming to grasps with all of this, and Izuku, for the life of him, can't find a single word worth speaking.

But then, he can. He does. And he says them.

"...You're right. I can't forgive you."

Bakugou doesn't interrupt, and Izuku clenches his fists and goes on.

"I want to. I really want to. I want to let bygones be bygones and I want to pretend nothing ever happened, but it *did.* It happened, Bakugou, and even if I said 'I forgive you,' it wouldn't mean anything. We'd both know I was lying."

Bakugou's face doesn't change. "Yeah. I wouldn't forgive me either if I

were you."

"But…" Izuku looks down at his hands, chewing on his lip. "I don't...I don't want to go on like this, either. I don't want to keep hating you. I don't want all this resentment and—" He waves his hands, gesturing at the two of them, "—whatever *this* is to continue. If we really want to be heroes...if we really want to move forward, then...we have to take those steps. We have to try."

Bakugou looks down. The fact that he isn't acting as explosive as usual could be taken as a good or bad sign.

"...I want to try."

Izuku stares. "You…?"

"I said I want to try," Bakugou snaps, lifting his head and meeting his eyes. *"Damn* it—we'll never be friends. I screwed that over too many times. We'll never come to that, you know it. I know it. But that doesn't mean we can't tolerate each other."

Izuku feels like he's looking at an entirely different person. Bakugou is still hostile; he's still explosive; he's still *Bakugou,* the same Bakugou he always was, but one thing's different.

He's listening.

He's actually *listening.* That alone is proof enough that somehow, even if they're never friends, even if they still hate each other in the end of all things, they can at least try to move forward.

Izuku stretches out his hand. After the longest of moments, Bakugou reaches out and shakes it with his own.

It is, by far, the weirdest thing that has ever happened between him and Bakugou. When he and Bakugou head inside once again (no one has noticed their absence, it would seem), Izuku has to keep reminding himself that that had actually happened.

Bakugou storms off immediately towards the elevator, and Izuku is just about to make his way to his own room when he notices five figures lurking in the shadowed hallway. It would seem Iida and Shouto weren't the only two who overheard Bakugou.

"So?" Uraraka asks, wringing her hands together. "How'd—?"

Izuku takes in a breath, then lets it out all at once. “It went…it actually went surprisingly well. I’m…still trying to compute what just happened.”

Kirishima and Uraraka release huge sighs of relief; Shouto, Tsuyu, and Iida seem a bit more wary, but they don’t question it.

“As long as he knocks it off,” Shouto says simply, “then I guess it was a good thing.”

“It’s going to be weird to see you and Bakugou actually getting along, though,” Kirishima admits, shaking his head. “He’s such a loose canon that it’s hard to picture him ever…y’know… *not* being a loose canon.”

Izuku sighs. “I’m not sure how much ‘getting along’ we’ll actually *do,* but…we definitely aren’t going to be fighting anymore. Or, at least, we’re going to be *trying* not to. I…don’t have any idea how well that’s actually gonna go. We’re trying, at least.”

“That’s good,” Tsuyu says, nodding. “But, like Kirishima said, it’s going to be weird either way.”

Izuku nods shortly, but he’s distracted. “Listen, I—I need to go make a phone call. Thanks for waiting up for me.”

“Don’t mention it,” Iida says immediately, then, turning to the others, “It’s late and we have school tomorrow, so everyone, please return to your rooms!”

Uraraka, Tsuyu and Kirishima bid them goodnight, and Izuku, Shouto and Iida return the gesture. The former three take the elevator after Bakugou, and the latter three, who reside on the first floor, head down the hall towards their rooms.

Izuku’s phone sits heavily in his pocket. He doesn’t think he’s ever noticed it before as much as he does now.

“Don’t stay up too late,” Iida tells them before heading into his room. “Todoroki. I’m assuming you’re going to wait up for Midoriya regardless of what I say. And Midoriya, I’m assuming you’re going to let him.”

They both nod. There’s no denying it. Iida nods back.

“Very well. But please keep your well-being in mind and don’t stay up too late.”

“We won’t,” Izuku promises. “Goodnight, Iida.”

“Goodnight, you two.”

Iida goes to bed and leaves them behind.

Toshinori doesn’t sleep a wink those next couple of nights. No matter how many times he closes his eyes, no matter how many books he reads, no matter what music he plays through his headphones, he can’t get those images out of his head. Ragdoll’s words came with so many mental images that he wishes he’d never conjured up in the first place, and even *then,* her story is only part of it. She doesn’t know everything. He doesn’t know everything.

Izuku knows everything, though. And already, the things Toshinori heard are bad enough. Shocked. Over and over again. With a countdown timer. Over and over. Over and over. Over and over.

Izuku’s hair turned white.

Toshinori is just about to get up and make some tea or something—anything to distract himself—when his phone rings on the bedside table. He reaches over and snatches it up, squinting against the light of the screen.

Incoming Call: Midoriya Izuku

Toshinori’s heart leaps into his throat, but he answers immediately and holds the phone to his ear. “Izuku? Are you alright?”

“Um, y-yeah.” Izuku sounds tired. *“I’m okay. Sorry for calling so late, I just…”*

“It’s alright.” Toshinori is more awake (and on edge) than he’s been in a while, and he sits up and flicks on the bedside lamp. “It’s like I said, I don’t mind you calling me. Whenever you need to. What’s up?”

“I-I just…I wanted to see if…if you were okay. After everything Ragdoll told you.”

Oh. “I’m fine, my boy.” The lie slips from his mouth easily. He almost wishes it was harder. “Don’t worry about me, alright? I’m alright.”

“I-I just thought that maybe you were blaming yourself for everything. I wanted to make sure you weren’t.”

How the kid hit the nail right on the head is kind of scary, but Toshinori doesn't let it show. "I assure you, I'm fine," Toshinori says again. "Don't worry about—"

Don't lie to me.

He stops mid-thought, feeling like someone had struck him right in the skull with the memory. Izuku's tone back then had been about the same as it is now; small, hesitant. Knowing.

Toshinori sighs. "...Actually, kiddo...you're right. You're absolutely right. I'm sorry."

"I figured." There's a long pause. *"Please don't. I know it's not going to happen easily, but it isn't your fault. Please try to stop blaming yourself, Toshinori-san. I'd feel a lot better if you didn't."*

Toshinori's heart clenches in his chest, and unbeknownst to himself, he smiles softly. "I'll try," he promises, nodding. He doesn't have the heart to say anything but. "I promise, I'll try."

"T-Thank you." There's another long pause. *"A-Also, d-do...do you think you could forward me Naomasa-san's number?"*

Toshinori knows why without asking for an explanation. It doesn't startle him. It doesn't throw him for a loop. He'd expected this, even though that reality doesn't make this any easier.

"Alright," Toshinori says, "one moment." He turns the phone on speaker and finds Izuku's messages. He forwards him Naomasa's phone number, as asked, then says, "Let me know if it comes in or not."

"It came in," Izuku answers, but his voice wavers now. *"Thank you. Again, I'm really sorry about calling this late—"*

"My boy, it's fine, honest. Please try to get some sleep, alright?"

"Okay, I-I'll try. And you too, Toshinori-san."

"I'll do my best. Goodnight, kiddo."

"N-Night, Toshinori-san."

The call terminates. Toshinori lays down again, but try as he might, he can't fall asleep.

“Naomasa-san? I-It’s Midoriya, Midoriya Izuku. I was…I was wondering if I could give my testimony soon.”

“Oh!” Naomasa sounds a mixture of surprised and business-like. *“Yeah, of course, if you’re sure you’re ready. This isn’t something you need or want to rush into, Midoriya-kun.”*

“I-I know,” Izuku answers, stroking his fingers through Howler’s fur restlessly, “but I’m as ready now as I’ll ever be. I really just want to get it over with.”

“Understood. I could come over tomorrow if U.A. would have me. We could talk there if you think that would be more comfortable than the station.”

Yes, it would be. “That sounds good,” Izuku says, nodding. “Thank you. O-Oh, also, I was—I was wondering if…if I could bring a few people. To listen.”

“You can bring whoever you’d like, Midoriya. Just keep it limited to under five people, okay?”

“Okay. I will.”

“Alright. I’ll give Aizawa a call to schedule it. I’ll see you tomorrow, Midoriya-kun.”

“You too, Naomasa-san. “

Izuku cuts the call and holds his phone in his lap for a long while. Then, he gets to his feet, crosses the room, and opens the door of his dorm. Shouto is waiting there, where he’s been since the start of it all, and he turns to Izuku with an air of concern and curiosity.

“How’d it go?” Shouto asks.

Izuku takes in a deep breath, then nods. “Tomorrow,” he says, and saying it makes it feel more real. “Naomasa will be here tomorrow to listen.”

Shouto nods stiffly.

“…And…if you don’t mind…” Izuku swallows hard. “I’d—I’d like for you to be there.”

“Of course,” Shouto answers without hesitation. “If you want me there, Izuku, then that’s exactly where I’ll be.”

Izuku nods shakily and wipes his eyes with the back of his hand. “T-Thanks, Thermostat.”

“It’s okay, don’t mention it. Do you want me to stay with you again tonight?”

“S-Sure.”

You Will Be Found

Chapter Summary

"You Will Be Found" from Dear Evan Hansen

"'Cause when you don't feel strong enough to stand,
You can reach, reach out your hand..."
///
"Even when the dark comes crashing through,
When you need a friend to carry you,
When you're broken on the ground,
You will be found."

Chapter Notes

You guys thank you so freaking much for all your patience jdkfldfg. This chapter really gave me a hard time about mid-way through it and I was spinning my wheels for a while but I'm alright with how it turned out. One more chapter after this (and then probably an epilogue, we'll see how chapter 40 goes) and then the fic is finished! Thank you all so much for everything and for hanging in there. You guys are the best.

And there's,,, there's so much art i'm so flattered,,, thank you all so much,,,,

fantasticduckpiefestival (Warning for blood/injury)

ItsBy(M)e

thevegetablewhichnoonedaresname

ificouldbringyouback

sprinklesparkleboom

Thanks for hanging in there with me you guys. <3 all loose ends, final moments, aftermaths, and promised dorm shenanigans will be covered next chapter! hope you enjoy this one!

Kind of a spoiler but I have to warn: this chapter contains a graphic panic attack.

“Shouto?”

Shouto *jumps* and whirls around to face him, wide-eyed. Izuku is dressed for the day, but his hair would suggest he just crawled out of his bed. Considering the time of day and that they’re only in the living room of the dormitory, it would definitely seem that’s the case.

“Sorry,” Shouto apologizes once he’s regained himself, and he straightens up to face him fully. “I didn’t hear you coming.”

Izuku bites his lip and looks down. For once, Howler isn’t at his side. “Sorry,” Izuku says with a shaky laugh, rubbing the back of his neck. “I should probably keep wearing my bell, huh?”

Shouto frowns. A lack of confidence isn’t something he’s come to expect from Izuku. He pretends not to notice and shrugs. “I mean, you don’t have to,” he says breezily. “Just because you don’t have any presence doesn’t mean you’re doing something wrong. I’m sure we’ll all learn to get used to it.”

Izuku nods, but he seems distracted. “Guess you’re right,” he says, before shaking his head. “Still, though, I mean…” He looks like there’s more he *wants* to say, but he changes his mind and shakes his head again, faster this time. “Actually nevermind, forget I said anything.”

Shouto quirks a brow at him, but doesn’t push further. “Do you know what time Naomasa is supposed to be here?” he asks instead, turning towards the kitchen and grabbing a mug from the cabinet.

“Not really,” Izuku answers. “He said around noon, but he didn’t give me a super specific time.”

Shouto shuts the cabinet and sets the mug down on the countertop. “Right.”

“Hey, you guys!”

Uraraka swings herself down the stairs with Howler hot on her heels. The dog breaks away from her side once he notices Izuku farther up ahead. Izuku reaches out and pats the dog’s head with a soft smile.

“Good morning,” Uraraka says, smiling at them, but it seems forced. “Did everyone else already head to class…?”

“As far as I know,” Shouto says, pouring himself a cup of coffee. “I’m not positive, though. I just woke up a few minutes ago.”

“I’ve been up since dawn,” Iida says from the couch, having overheard; he’s reading a book, but doesn’t seem too intently focused on it. “The others left for class approximately half an hour ago.”

“Ah, I see. Thanks.” Uraraka turns back to Shouto and Izuku. “Is Kirishima up yet?”

“Nope,” Shouto answers, and then, to Izuku, “You want coffee? I made enough for everyone.”

Izuku shakes his head, patting Howler’s head again. “No, I’m good.”

It’s probably for the best. He hasn’t exactly been sleeping well.

It’s weird, having the dormitory to themselves. Usually, there’s never a dull moment around here. But with the police coming by for Izuku’s testimony, Aizawa had thought it best to give him and those who were sitting in with him the day off. Plus that way, Naomasa and the others could speak freely without worrying about prying ears.

Amongst those Izuku picked to sit in with him are Iida, Uraraka, Shouto, Kirishima, and—

The elevator doors slide open with a *ding!,* and out steps Kaminari.

If anyone wonders why Kaminari of all people, they don't say it. Which is nice because Izuku doesn't want to explain anything until he absolutely has to.

That moment comes long before he's ready. It isn't just his chosen few who are present for it; Toshinori and Aizawa are there, too, though far more in the background. Izuku sits on the couch in between Shouto and Uraraka while Iida, Kirishima and Kaminari squeeze in close and Naomasa sits across from them on a stool. Toshinori and Aizawa watch from further back, almost like they don't want anyone to know they're there.

Naomasa is empty handed, which kind of fills Izuku with a sense of relief. He folds his hands together loosely, Izuku digs his fingers into Howler's fur, and Shouto settles a comforting hand on his forearm.

"So, Midoriya... " Naomasa leans forward, cool and collected. "I'm not going to ask you any questions. This isn't an interrogation. Tell me whatever you feel comfortable saying, and nothing else. Okay?"

His voice is soothing enough, but his words aren't. Izuku isn't comfortable with anything he's supposed to share anyway, so what's the point of leaving anything out? Might as well just spill his whole life story.

He swallows hard to calm his frazzled nerves. Uraraka places a hand on his forearm, too, mindful not to touch the bandages on his wrist. Izuku draws in a breath and assures himself once more that it'll all be over soon. He won't have to think about it for much longer. All he has to do now is speak. He wishes he'd practiced. Come more prepared.

But nonetheless he’s here now. He lets his breath go and nods. “Alright... so, just... where do you want me to start... ?”

“Preferably from the beginning, if you would please, Midoriya.”

Izuku nods. “... I... I really don't know how to actually put this, but…” His fingernails dig into his palms but he doesn’t remember consciously balling his fists. “The first thing they did, after the warp gate dropped me into the room, is... they shocked me. Like. An electric shock.”

He feels Uraraka and Shouto tense, but doesn't dare look at them or the others. He can't bear to see their faces. He doesn’t want to but he keeps going. If just to *get it over with.*

“So, um, yeah. It wasn't like a small shock, either. Like—they were trying to hurt me. And they did.”

He doesn't trust himself to look at his friends' faces and instead distracts himself by maintaining eye contact with Naomasa. Naomasa nods stiffly and moves a hand.

"Continue, Midoriya."

Izuku takes in a deep breath. "So, erm, the villains—they figured out that as long as I'm in constant pain, I can't Dissociate. So they set a timer for the shocking mechanism and let it go freely."

There's something building in the pit of his stomach. He feels sick. Howler plops his head in his lap, but it's not as comforting as it should be. He reminds himself that if he gets it all out now, he'll never have to do it again. That's the one thing that makes him open his mouth and continue,

"So, uh, they—kept shocking me like that."

"Let me ask you this, Midoriya," Naomasa says, leaning forward. "Do you know why they abducted you in the first place? Did they say anything specific?"

"Uhhh, yeah. They wanted me to, um... well, he, All For One, he wanted me to willingly give up my Quirks."

He hadn't specified because Uraraka, Kaminari, Kirishima, Iida, and Aizawa don't know, but those who do—Toshinori, Shouto, Naomasa—understand the implications immediately.

Naomasa nods. "Sorry for stopping you," he says, sitting back again. "Please, go on."

Izuku summons his will and tries gathering his momentum again. If he's stopped once more he's not sure he'll be able to pick himself back up. "S-So, I said no and he kept on with the timed shocks and stuff. And then, Ragdoll—"

He doesn't even say it. He doesn't have the chance to before his body reacts negatively.

His throat fills with bile, and a hand snaps up to cover his mouth.

"Midoriya—!"

In an instant, there's commotion all around, voices calling his name, shifting on the couch. But he shakes his head with closed eyes, waving his free hand. He can't speak, so this is the best he can do.

He doesn't actually throw up, thankfully, but all the memories that come flooding back bring him scarily close. When he drops down from his high and his heart rate returns to normal, he's aware of Uraraka's and Shouto's hands on either of his forearms, along with Kirishima's hand in his hair and Iida's on his shoulder. Kaminari had scooted all the way to the edge of the couch, white as a sheet. Howler looks at him, but doesn't leave Izuku's side.

"Midoriya." Naomasa brings a hand to his shoulder, and Izuku meets his eyes. The detective's brows are furrowed in concern, and his gaze is solemn.

"If you can't do it now," Naomasa says, "there's no shame in that. You don't have to say anything until you're ready—"

"N-No, please," Izuku gasps out, shaking his head. "If I stop now I'm

never going to be able to start again. Please. Please, let me."

If Naomasa had refused, Izuku wouldn't have blamed him. But he doesn't. Instead he releases Izuku's shoulder and returns to his former position on the stool, though much more apprehensive than before.

“I’ll let you continue,” Naomasa says, and he looks every bit as unhappy about it as he sounds, “but if something like that happens again, then just for the sake of your wellbeing, we're going to have to plan another day. Alright?"

Izuku nods, barely. He can keep it together just a little bit longer, he knows he can. Just a little bit longer. A little bit longer and then he can break. A little longer and he’ll never have to go through this again.

"Okay... " He nods shakily again, this time to reassure himself. “Okay. So, All For One. He took Ragdoll’s Quirk away from her. He did it right in front of me to try and teach me a lesson. A-After... after *that,* he threw me back in this cell. Told Toga to up the wattage on the shockers. It went on for... I-I don’t even know how long. Then I tricked Toga into thinking I was unconscious, used the shocker against her, and ran.”

Shouto’s hand squeezes his. Izuku returns the gesture.

“So you escaped on your own afterwards,” Naomasa says, and by the tone of his voice, Izuku can tell he’s hoping the answer is a yes. The sooner they’re done with all this, the better.

Izuku nods. “Y-Yeah. Got out of there. Met All For One on the field, but everyone already saw that s-so I don’t think I need to explain it again.”

He *really hopes* he doesn’t have to because he is *this close, this close.*

“You don’t,” Naomasa assures, shaking his head, and Izuku lets out a *huge* sigh of relief. While he rests his head in a hand and his friends gather a little closer, Naomasa rises to his feet. “I think that’s all I need to know, Midoriya. If there’s something you forgot or anything you’d like to add, you can call me anytime. Alright?”

Izuku nods without thinking about it, though he doesn’t open his eyes. He really doesn’t care what he has to do at this point so long as it can be over. His hands are shaking way too much for his liking and he can’t make them stop no matter how hard he tries.

Izuku doesn't really remember Naomasa leaving, but he does remember Toshinori and Aizawa speaking with Iida about something he can't hear, way off in the distance. Shouto is talking by him, saying something about going back to his room so he can have some breathing space, and he agrees to it without fully hearing it, but can't bring himself to rise. The only real thing is Shouto's and Uraraka's hands around his and Howler's head on his thigh.

And then he's choking on tears.

He doesn't know when they started, and he can't think clearly enough to stop them. It's not that he hasn't cried about the Kamino thing before, because he has; but talking about it with everyone, the realization that his friends *know* about it now, brings a dagger somewhere near his heart.

Shouto reacts first by drawing him into a tight embrace. He's barely aware of moving, but he hugs Shouto back tightly and buries his face against his shoulder. Uraraka wraps her arms around his waist and presses her face between his shoulder blades, and Howler shoves his head into Izuku's lap, but doesn't interfere with his friends. For what feels like an eternity, he cries and they don't stop him.

Izuku doesn't know how long it goes on for, but eventually the arms around him disappear, and he's being guided by his friends down the hall to his room. Shouto, Uraraka, Iida, and Kirishima are all with him to see if he's alright and to ask if he wants them to stay with him, but Izuku responds quickly that he's alright being alone. It sounds like a lie, even to him, but his friends don't question him.

He flops on his bed, dry-eyed but with a tightness in his chest and throat. Howler lies on top of him as per usual, and he falls into a dreamless sleep.

The next time he wakes up, it's because someone is knocking on his door. By the sound of it, they're tentative.

Izuku sits up, which forces Howler to jump off him. There's a headache nagging at his temples and he feels utterly spent, but nonetheless, his curiosity sees him through. He watches the door and waits for another knock, but one doesn't come. Instead, something slides under the crack at the bottom of the door. A folded slip of paper.

He hops out of bed and makes his way over to the door curiously with

Howler close at his heels. Izuku sits down and takes the note into his hands, flipping it open to reveal what's inside. In poor handwriting, the note is written, and it reads:

Hey Midoriya.

I know I'm probably the last person you want to see or talk to, like, ever, but I just. Don't know what to do. I wanna do something but I don't know what.

I just. I wanted to say I'm sorry for what happened. I'm sorry I was careless during the training camp. I'm sorry about everything.

I'm outside the door if you wanna write back. If not that's fine too.

-Kaminari

Izuku looks down at the note for a little while longer, taking all this in; and then he jumps to his feet and snatches a pen and notepad off his desk. He takes his seat on the floor with Howler again, leaning against the door, and writes a quick note. He tears it from the notebook and folds it in half before slipping it through the crack.

I'm not trying to avoid you, Kaminari. It's just, my brain connects you with what happened at Kamino and I don't know how to make that stop yet. Nothing what happened was your fault and there's nothing wrong with you or your Quirk. It's the damn villains who did this to me, not you.

I'm sure I'll figure it out. Or, we all will, I guess. I don't hate you and I don't want to stop seeing you or anything like that. For now, I just, think I need some time to think about everything.

It's not going to be this way forever, I promise.

It's a little while longer before he receives any kind of response; then, a note slips under the door by his leg, and he opens it.

I'm really sorry. What happened to you was so messed up, dang, I don't even think you know how messed up it was. Or maybe you do and you're

just putting on a brave front, I don't know.

Listen, this might be kind of uncalled for but, if you ever feel like a lingering sensation? Like you're still being shocked or something but not entirely? Usually taking a cold shower helps take the edge off it. For me, anyway. I don't know if it'll help you at all but I thought it was worth mentioning, maybe.

I don't know.

Izuku swallows hard, but writes back;

Thanks, Kaminari. That actually helps a lot.

If you have any other suggestions or anything I'd love to hear them.

He sends his note. Another one returns quickly.

It's not what Izuku wants it to be, this entire situation, but every time he sees Kaminari he thinks about the training camp incident, which of course reminds him of everything that'd happened at Kamino. And that's not fair to Kaminari, just as much as it isn't fair to him.

So this works. While it's not what he wants, it works. A way for him and Kaminari to still be friends until Izuku can work through some of this baggage he's yet to go through.

Not long after finds Toshinori and Aizawa headed down the hallway back at the main building, towards the teacher's lounge. They'd spoken to Iida briefly after Izuku had finished sharing, and as much as Toshinori wanted to go gather Izuku into his arms and hold him tightly, his friends had it covered. It was better for Toshinori to not intervene.

Now he and Aizawa are back at U.A.'s main building. They haven't spoken a single word since leaving Heights Alliance, and the silence is starting to get to him.

"We're definitely going to get him to see a therapist," Aizawa says, just as Toshinori opens his mouth to voice nearly the same thing.

“There’s no way he can work through all of that on his own, and we aren’t exactly eligible to help.”

Toshinori couldn’t agree more. It hurts his heart to think about, but even just going by what Ragdoll told him and the police, Izuku should definitely talk to someone about what he’d been through. Moreover, he should talk to a professional who can help him work through this.

“I’ll talk to Recovery Girl about it,” Aizawa says when Toshinori doesn’t (can’t) speak. “I’m sure she’ll be able to sort something out. Until then, I guess I’ll be taking over your classes.”

Toshinori frowns at him. “Why do you say that?”

“Because there’s no way you’re leaving that kid alone,” Aizawa answers curtly. “I know you too well. I can’t *always* take over your class for you,” he adds sharply, “but I can do my best.”

“Aizawa, you don’t have to—”

“I *know* I don’t. But I know how much that kid means to you, and I know how much you mean to him. He needs all the support he can get right about now, and domestic situations are…” He pauses and rubs the back of his neck. “... A bit out of my league.”

That’s fair, Toshinori thinks, but still. Even if he’s worried about Izuku, even if he doesn’t want to leave the boy’s side, even if he never wants to leave his side again,

“We can figure something out,” Toshinori says, shaking his head. “I don’t want you to overwork yourself, either.”

Aizawa *snorts*.

“I’m being serious,” Toshinori says, “we need to—”

“Okay, okay, fine,” Aizawa relents, putting up his hands. “I get it. You feel bad letting me take over for you every time. We’ll figure something out eventually, but for now, just be there for the kid. We’ll take turns.”

Toshinori digests this, then nods. “Sounds good.”

Izuku feels somewhat better the next day, when he's able to go back to class with everyone. He'd slept well, Howler is in a good mood, and he feels as good as he's felt in a long while. Maybe sharing his testimony

really had helped like everyone said it would and he'd hoped it would.

He notices Toshinori's eyes on him almost constantly that day, though. He doesn't say anything at first, but the longer it goes on and nothing changes, he more worried he becomes. He knows it makes perfect sense for his mentor to worry about him, especially after everything, but...

He catches him right after closing session that day, as he heads down the hallway towards an unknown destination.

"Toshinori!"

Toshinori jumps and turns towards him sharply. "Izuku, my boy," he says, as Izuku halts in front of him. "What's the matter? Is something wrong?"

There's something distinctly heartbreaking about the look in his mentor's eyes that he can't shake. Izuku swallows hard, but doesn't back down. He doesn't even flinch when Howler's nose presses against his hand.

"Toshinori, can we talk?"

Toshinori's eyes flicker with something, but it's gone before Izuku can figure out what it is.

"Certainly," he says, nodding. "I was... actually just about to text you and ask you to come to the teacher's lounge. There's something I need to talk to you about as well."

Izuku tilts his head to one side. "Okay... ? So... now?"

Toshinori heaves a breath. "If you don't mind."

Howler bumps Izuku's hand again, and this time Izuku responds by threading his fingers through the dog's fur.

"That's fine."

"You first," they say, unintentionally at the same time. They meet eyes and hold each other's gaze for a bit, and eventually Toshinori shakes his head.

"You can go first, my boy."

Izuku swallows hard, looking down at his legs hanging off the side of the stool. Toshinori is seated on the couch, and Howler, at Izuku's side.

"Toshinori, I... I know you're still upset, about what happened at Kamino." Toshinori tenses, which tells him he'd hit the nail on the head. "I just... wanted to say that I'm okay."

“Midoriya…” Toshinori folds his hands together and rests his head against them, closing his eyes. To Izuku, he looks very tired and very torn. “I know you’re trying to be reassuring, my boy. I know you’re trying not to worry the people around you. I know you’re not having an easy time of it. You can’t be.”

Izuku swallows hard. He’s *right,* of course, but it still hurts. “I know,” he admits, “I just, it’s hard being the person everyone’s worried about, y’know? I wanna go back to being the dumb pun ghost ‘Midoriya,’ not ‘that traumatized kid from Kamino.’”

“I understand,” Toshinori says, lowering his hands from his face to his lap, “but you have to give yourself time to heal, too. You can’t force yourself back into a sense of normality, my boy. It never lasts.”

He knows that, too, but that doesn’t make it any easier. “I-I get it,” Izuku says, “I just… wish it wasn’t like that.”

“I wished it wasn’t, either,” Toshinori agrees, shaking his head, “but it is, and you’ll get that normality back, Midoriya. You will get it back, it just…”

Izuku nods stiffly. “Takes time,” he finishes, and Toshinori heaves a sigh and nods. A silence passes, then ends.

“I’m sorry if I’m upsetting you,” Toshinori says thickly, “but I only worry because I care about you so much. And what happened to you is unfair, and I want things to get back to normal, too, just as much as you and your classmates. We *will* get there, but you can’t expect to wake up tomorrow and everything is suddenly okay.”

“I know,” Izuku says, nodding. “T-Thanks…”

“You don’t have to thank me,” Toshinori says, shaking his head. “Is there anything else you’d wanted to talk about?”

Izuku shakes his head, stroking Howler’s fur behind his ears. “No. What did *you* want to talk about?”

Toshinori nods as though to reassure himself, then takes in a deep breath. “We would like you to meet with a therapist, Midoriya. A professional who can help you work through some of what you’ve got bottled up better than we can.”

A therapist. Izuku *hadn’t* been expecting it, but honestly, he probably should have. After Toshinori, Aizawa, and Naomasa all heard his testimony and have a better idea of what he went through, not to mention what’s going on with Kaminari, he really should have anticipated this a bit more.

“If that would make you uncomfortable,” Toshinori adds quickly, “then we don’t have to dive into it right now. We can wait until things settle down a bit more.”

“N-No, it’s not that,” Izuku says, shaking his head, “I was just kind of surprised is all. I wouldn’t mind seeing a therapist, especially if, y’know… they can help me with some of this…” He tries to find the right word, then settles for gesturing vaguely to himself. His white hair is the first thing that comes to mind appearance-wise.

Toshinori winces slightly, but nods. “Right. Okay. If you’re alright with it—and please, be honest with me if you aren’t.”

“I am.”

“—Then I’ll let Recovery Girl know, and we can go through with it.” Toshinori rises to his feet, and Izuku hops down from the stool. “I’ll let your mother know, also.”

Izuku nods. “Sounds like a plan. I’m… trying to come up with some kind of therapy pun but I can’t think of any right now.”

“That’s alright.” Toshinori reaches out, hesitates a second, then ruffles Izuku’s hair gently. His fingers barely touch his scalp at all. “I’m sure you’ll think of some later and send them to me tonight at an ungodly hour. Which, of course, I don’t mind.”

Izuku cracks a smile.

Recovery Girl wants to see him, apparently. She hadn’t sat in for his testimony, but judging by the added creases on her face and her overall demeanor, he has his suspicions that she knows exactly what’d happened.

“Ahh, thank you for coming,” she says, trying to sound like her usual self. “Well, go on and sit down, child. Give me just a moment.”

Izuku nods and crosses the room, hopping onto the hospital bed and scooting back. Recovery Girl flips through a couple papers at her desk, then reaches for and tears open a big yellow envelope from an address Izuku doesn’t have time to read.

She turns the contents over in her hand.

"What's it about?" Izuku asks, swinging his legs back and forth absentmindedly.

Recovery Girl doesn't look at him. "The doctor mentioned a bracelet wouldn't work to monitoring your pulse anymore," she says, "so I had an anklet ordered instead. Would that work?"

As she speaks, she holds up the device where he can see it. It's almost just like his bracelet, only slightly bigger, with a Velcro clasp. Izuku goes ahead and slips off his shoe so Recovery Girl can put it on.

"If it's too tight let me know," she says, strapping it on. Once it's secure, she flips a small switch on the side. The red light begins blinking softly.

"That good?" she says, straightening up. Izuku nods, slipping back into his boot.

"It's perfect, thank you," he says, and it's far nicer than a bracelet, now. He's glad they were able to make this change.

"Well, off you go," she says, going him a prompting slap between the shoulder blades. "Be sure to come back if you have any trouble, alright?"

Izuku nods, thanks her one more time, and leaves with Howler.

Izuku heads back to the dormitory with Howler right afterwards. When he steps through the front doors, Kirishima, Jirou, Satou and Yaoyorozu are on the floor playing cards while Iida and Bakugou are in the kitchen, probably making dinner. Everyone likes to eat early when they can; gives them more time in the evenings to do whatever they want.

Besides, it’s a Friday. Which means that sleep, unless absolutely

necessary, is absolutely invalid.

“Aw, Howler!” Ashido says, but before she calls him over, she lifts her head to look Izuku in the eyes. “Midori-chan, can I…?”

Izuku smiles and nods, and Ashido beckons Howler over. Howler races towards her, licks her face when she kneels down, and Izuku watches for a little while longer before turning and heading into the kitchen to see what everyone else is up to.

Initially, he’d thought it was just Iida and Bakugou in the kitchen, but he was wrong. Shouto, Uraraka, and Tsuyu are all there, too, and while Shouto and Uraraka don’t seem to be doing anything, Tsuyu bustles about with Iida and gathers things for Bakugou, who, while looking like he’d rather be anywhere *but* here, doesn’t seem too angry about cooking for everyone. He and Bakugou haven’t really spoken to each other at all since their talk outside the school. Even that feels distant.

Izuku catches Kaminari’s eye on his way into the kitchen. Kaminari isn’t playing the card game, rather sitting on the couch to watch everyone else do it. He smiles faintly, and Izuku returns the gesture ten-fold before heading into the kitchen with a slight spring in his step.

Some sense of normality is returning.

“We’re making katsudon!” says Uraraka brightly almost the second he’s in the kitchen. “Everyone here really likes it, and Bakugou says he’s good at making it, too!”

“Screw you, of course I’m good at making it!” Bakugou snaps back, but there’s something about his tone that lacks the usual bite. “Oy, Frog-girl, do we got any taiyakis or not?”

Tsuyu pulls open the freezer, and when she shuts it, there’s a box of frozen pastries tucked under an arm. According to the label on the side, there are a total of twenty four pastries in the box.

“Got it,” she says, setting the box on the counter and opening it with a pair of scissors. “Are we making them for everyone?”

“I mean, I’d assume so,” says Iida, frowning. “Do you want to bake them or microwave them?”

“Microwaving is faster,” Bakugou says. “Lemme get this crap in the

oven and we'll start doing that."

Non-traditional katsudon, seems like. Making it in a large batch so there's plenty for everyone. If Izuku didn't think he'd bite his head off, he'd thank Bakugou, because there's no way him choosing to make katsudon tonight is a coincidence.

"Don't forget a taiyaki for Howler," says Tsuyu.

Bakugou rolls his eyes like he *literally cannot believe she'd said that* but he *does* count out twenty two taiyakis instead of just twenty. A small thing, but it *does* make Izuku smile.

Shouto puts the remaining three taiyakis back in their box and in the freezer. "We should probably do several batches, right?" he says, turning to Satou rather than Bakugou. "Instead of shoving them all in the microwave at once."

"I mean," Izuku says, shrugging, "good luck trying to put twenty one taiyakis in a microwave, anyway. Tried it before and I wouldn't advise it."

Shouto gives him this long stare, blinking twice in between it. "That's oddly specific."

"Well," Bakugou says, irritatedly shutting the oven with more force than necessary, "if you're so knowledgeable then why don't you do it yourself?"

"Okay, I will," Izuku says, stepping towards the cabinet to grab one of their microwave-safe plates. "You don't have to be so short with me. You could use a little more *pastry* ence."

Bakugou slams his hands down on the table and pushes himself off, turning away. "I'm done. I'm friggin' *done. You* can make dinner, I'm gonna go punch something."

"It's already in the oven, anyway," Uraraka says, intentionally not loud enough for Bakugou to hear, "so I'll just keep an eye on the clock."

"To be fair, Midoriya," says Satou, frowning embarrassedly, "that *was,* erm, kinda desperate."

"I liked it," Shouto says, and Izuku whirls around to face him with a bright grin.

“My one true supporter. I always knew I could count on you.”

Shouto holds up a peace sign by his face. “Any time.”

“You should tell Tensei that,” Iida says, straightening his glasses. He looks fed up, but is trying to keep his composure. “I’m sure he’d appreciate it.”

“And you don’t?” Izuku says, setting the taiyakis on the plate and popping them into the microwave. He punches in the numbers on the timer, then starts the machine. “I’m hurt, Iida. I thought…”

4:58, 4:57, 4:56, 4:54…

Izuku blinks at the countdown, long and hard. The others are still groaning over his joke, but they notice his sudden change of tone and stop.

“Midoriya?” Iida asks, and Izuku can feel his eyes bearing into his but he can’t move. “Are you alright?”

It snaps him out of his daze, and he shakes his head. “O-Oh, I’m fine,” Izuku says with a smile, trying to brush it off. “Just got lost in thought, I guess. Haven’t heard from Tensei in a while. How’s he doing?”

Howler’s wet nose bumps his hand. The dog whines.

4:43, 4:42, 4:41, 4:40…

“Izuku?” Shouto notices next that something isn’t quite right, and he steps forward and puts a hand on his shoulder. It takes everything in Izuku not to flinch. “Hey? You good?”

“Y-Yeah, I’m…”

25, 24, 23, 22, 21, 20…

“… I’m fine…”

18, 17, 16, 15, 14, 13, 12…

His fingers are curled into fists he doesn’t remember making. His breath gets stuck in his throat, and the edges of his sight turn black. Shouto’s hand is still on his shoulder, squeezing, but he feels it less and less. Howler is whining at him, slightly louder this time. He thinks people are talking to him but he can’t hear their voices.

9, 8, 7, 6, 5…

Here it comes, here it comes, again, brace—

3, 2, 1—

“Midoriya!”

Iida’s sharp tone is enough to snap him back to reality, but it’s so jarring and abrupt that it sends him stumbling back. He hits the side of the counter, fingers scrambling for purchase, but his hands are shaking and all he can do is stumble.

And fall.

And dissociate.

His body *slams* into the floor before anyone can stop it, and it’d been sudden enough for Uraraka to let out a short but loud shriek. It draws the attention of the rest of his classmates in the common room, and soon everyone is in the kitchen and they’re all asking what’s wrong and all Izuku can do is cup translucent hands over his mouth and *try* to get ahold of himself.

He can’t. He’s a spirit and he shouldn’t be able to feel anything at all because he usually *doesn’t* when he dissociates but this time he *does* and he *can’t*.

“Izuku?”

Shouto, Iida, and Uraraka are kneeling on the floor by his crumpled body. The others stay back (probably told off by Iida or Yaoyorozu, but Izuku didn’t hear it). It’s been a long time since Izuku last dissociated. And an even longer time since it happened without his consent.

“Izuku, come on,” Shouto says, lifting his head into the air where he assumes Izuku is. He’s not too far off, but he ends up staring into empty space. “Come back, Izuku.”

Uraraka nods firmly. Her eyes are shimmering. “Please come back, Deku. It’ll be okay, we promise, but please—please, come back.”

A big part of him doesn’t want to. He wants to zoom away from his body until his time limit goes up and he wants to never think about anything ever again.

But he doesn't do that.

Slowly, he shuts his eyes and allows his spirit to drift back into his physical self.

Just as soon as his spiritual and physical bodies have become one, he's heaving and gasping for breath again. Breath he can't find. Breath his petrified lungs refuse to bring in.

Shouto is in front of him, he sees his panicked eyes, but it's all aimless noise in his ears. Nothing makes sense and his heart pounds and his throat constricts and his fingers dig into his hair and he can't breathe anymore and he can't think and all he can feel are shackles on his wrists and the faint ghost of electricity twisting his nerves and wracking his body—

"Izuku, hey."

Somehow, it isn't a shout or a snap or a yell that brings him out of it this time. It's Shouto's quiet, hesitant, but somehow reassuring tone. He feels something real, something that isn't shackles touch his wrists and pull them down from his hair. He lifts his head and meets Shouto's eyes and all he sees is muted fear overlayed by desperation and worry.

Behind him, the others have gathered around to see what the problem was, and they look at Izuku from over Shouto's shoulder with the same face. They're worried. They're scared. They're confused and they don't know what happened, but he can tell they want to do *something.*

Shouto's hands find his shoulders. Howler's nose bumps his cheek. Uraraka's fingers squeeze his. Iida kneels nearby with Satou. And Izuku finally manages to take a breath. And another breath. And another breath. Until he's breathing, and his heartrate slows down, and his trains of thought slowly gather themselves and begin to move.

His forehead bumps Shouto's when he lifts his gaze, and they meet eyes for a long moment.

"You're okay?" Shouto asks, quietly but firmly, too, almost like he's promising it even though it's phrased as a question.

Now that it's over and Izuku is able to think, his thoughts rage and toss and he feels more vulnerable than ever. He knows his friends love him and he knows he doesn't have anything to be afraid of anymore; he knows All For One is in jail and the villains are gone and he knows

they're not coming back.

But Kaminari is here too and he's worried. And everyone else is worried. And *Izuku* is scared. And he doesn't know what else to do or what to say.

So he does what he always does .

He cracks a faint, painfully smile and says, even while tears burn his eyes and begin to slip down his cheeks, "I don't know *watt* just happened."

Except, he does know.

And so does everyone else.

It's not until he *realizes* that that the tears actually start falling for real, and Shouto awkwardly but confidently pulls him into his arms, and Howler is there, squeezing his way in between them so Izuku can bury his face in his fur, and Uraraka hugs him from behind while Iida's hand squeezes his shoulder and the others gather closer, kneeling, sitting, not too close but close enough. Close enough to where they could reach out if he needed them. Close enough to *be there.*

"If you're holding back, don't," Shouto speaks, quietly, but loud enough for him and him only to hear. "You have every right to cry, Izuku. It's okay."

Coming from Shouto, this hits him a lot harder than it normally would, and he dissolves further without even consenting to it. This has been a long time coming and he's finally snapped.

As crushing as these feelings are, it's nice to finally let it all go.

Shouta received a disturbing text from Iida earlier. Midoriya had had a panic attack in the kitchen while they were making dinner.

It wasn't until several hours after the fact that Shouta received the notice. Iida met him in the hall on his way out of U.A. and towards Heights Alliance to explain the situation in greater detail.

"We didn't want to make a bigger deal out of it than everyone already was," Iida is saying as they move at a brisk powerwalk that's so close to being a sprint, "and Midoriya was… quite distressed. He didn't want to bring anyone into it that he didn't have to and he was already

upset that he let… *that* happen in front of us.”

On one hand that makes sense, but they should have told someone sooner, whether or not they thought they had the situation under control. “Where is he now?” Shouta questions. “And more importantly *how* is he?”

“He’s sleeping, I believe,” Iida replies readily, like he’d been expecting the question before it was asked. “Or, that’s how he was when I left. It took a long time for everyone to finally calm down, but Midoriya was drained after the whole ordeal and fell asleep on the couch not long after. I don’t think he intended to do it, but that’s beside the point.”

Shouta nods stiffly and keeps forward. They leave the main building and start towards Heighs Alliance. Iida stays by Shouta's side and gets the door once they arrive.

The Class 1-A students are gathered in the living room and part like the Red Sea. Shouta can feel their fear and concern in the atmosphere, but doesn't dwell on it for any longer than he has to.

With the students out of the way, he can see Midoriya. Like Iida had told him, he's sleeping, though his face is paler than it should be. Howler is laying on top of him and doesn't even raise his head when Shouta approaches. While the dog doesn't seem apprehensive, he's definitely protective.

"We think it's a panic attack," Uraraka says to him, and when he looks at her, he can see every ounce of fear and concern etched carefully on her face. The others' expressions mirror her own in collective agreement. "D-Do... do you think he'll be okay?"

They’re anxious, all of them. Watching him with wide, desperate eyes and hoping his answer isn’t as harsh as reality. He glances at Midoriya sleeping on the couch again, at Howler on his chest, then at his friends surrounding him.

He’s not okay *now,* but they aren’t trapped in the “now.” The “now” isn’t all there will ever be.

“Yeah,” Shouta says with as much confidence and promise as he can. “He’ll be okay. Keep an eye out for him, though, and let me know if anything changes. As strong as he is, he needs our strength there alongside his if he’s going to make it through this.”

The students react exactly how Shouta expects them to. The worried

air morphs into something stronger, into something less aimless. He sees the understanding in their eyes, the determination set deep in their gazes and he knows.

Midoriya will be okay. And his classmates—along with Shouta, Toshinori, and the rest of the U.A. staff—are going to do whatever it takes to ensure that.

Today was hard on my boy. He didn't smile very much and all he felt was sad and fear. He was worried about what his friends would think. I was not worried. I can feel their love for him. They would do anything to make sure he's safe but he doesn't always know that.

My boy loves them too and that's why he was scared. He didn't want them to feel sad like he does. But they did and they do feel sad, they feel sad for him because they love him. Just like I do.

My boy had a hard day, but he got through it because he is strong and he is not alone. I try to be there for him but I am not always enough. I am Howler and Howler is me but I am not my boy's friends. I am not who he always needs.

He's okay now. The worst of his bad feelings are over. He is sleeping now and his friends are here, too. They are close to him. Protecting him. Keeping the badness away. But his friends are tired and drained too and they're sleeping. How can they protect him if they're sleeping?

That's okay. I will do it for them. My job is to protect my boy and that is what I will do. If anyone tries to harm him I will stop them. If another beeping machine starts beeping, I will shut it up.

They brought blankets down to the big room and they're on the floor together, to keep my boy company. My boy's teachers came to see them earlier and to make sure he's okay, and they're worried, too, but they were happy to see that he was okay. They told me I was a good boy but they don't know that it's my *boy who's the good one.*

I am Howler and Howler is me, and I feel things. I feel the things my boy feels. I feel the things my boy's friends feel. I do not know why I feel them. Maybe it's so I can protect him better. Maybe it's a good thing. I do not know. I do not understand many things.

But either way, I will protect my boy and his friends while they sleep. It is my job and I will do it well.

He is my boy and I would do anything for him and his friends.

Finale

Chapter Summary

"Finale" from Dear Evan Hansen

“All we see is sky, for forever.
We let the world pass by, for forever.
Feels like we could go on forever, this way.
All we see is light.
Watch the sun burn bright.
We could be alright for forever, this way.
All we see is sky for forever.
All I see is sky for forever.”

Chapter Notes

Well. This is it. For almost a full year now we've run this race and we've made it to the finish line. I'll save the chatter for later, but before we get into it, some wonderful art.

undertheriver

heyidrawnstuff

And a tremendous thank you to all the artists who drew for this fic previously. Thanks to every reader, every artist, every commenter, everyone who stuck with this story long enough to see the conclusion. Thank you all very much, and I hope you enjoy the chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Izuku wakes up, he’s utterly drained and exhausted, but also somehow *okay*.

He feels Howler’s weight and warmth on his chest before he even opens his eyes, and he moves a hand and slowly threads his fingers through the dog’s fur. He hears Howler’s tail thump against the couch over and over and can’t help but smile softly.

He opens his eyes. It’s still dark, but when his eyes adjust, he realizes he isn’t in his own room at home, or even his room at the dormitory. He’s in the common room, lying on the couch with Howler on his chest and his friends bundled in blankets on the floor around him.

In a rush, Izuku remembers what happened, but it doesn't startle him, or even bring down his mood. As scared as he'd been while it was happening, now that it's over, he doesn't dwell on it. Although he'll probably have to talk about the microwave thing to Toshinori because he doesn't want it happening again if he can help it.

He starts to sit up, but Howler won't budge, and he makes a low, unhappy noise when Izuku tries to move him.

"I'm just getting some water," Izuku murmurs, then swallows to clear some of the soreness in his throat. It doesn't help. "I'll be right back, okay?"

This seems to satisfy Howler, because he lets Izuku get up and doesn't make a move to stop him. Izuku carefully navigates around and in between his friends' sleeping figures until he finally makes it into the kitchen. He doesn't turn on any lights, but his eyes have adjusted enough for him to see just fine.

Against his better judgement, he looks at the microwave. He doesn't really know why he does it; it's one of those things where he doesn't *want* to, but can't help himself. Like that unnerving feeling that someone's following you down a hallway; you don't want to look but you end up doing it anyway.

It's off, of course, but he notices that the screen displaying the digital timer has been taped over several times with several different types of tape. It looks so much like a bad repair job that for a second he forgets that there's a timer beneath all that tape.

He smiles, gets his water, guzzles it, then heads back into the common room.

He's almost to the couch again when a voice speaks to him in the darkness. "Midoriya? What are you doing up?"

Izuku turns and meets Iida's eyes in the dark. Iida is sitting up with his blanket beneath him, and it would seem he's been awake ever since Izuku got up. He looks worried.

Izuku smiles as reassuringly as he can and shakes his head. "I'm fine," he murmurs back, barely above a whisper. "I was just getting some water."

This seems to satisfy Iida, who nods as the worry melts into relief. "I see," he says. "Sorry. I was just... a bit concerned when you left for the

kitchen..."

Izuku smiles again, and instead of settling down on the couch again with Howler, he snatches his blankets off and starts slowly toward Iida.

"Mind if I move over there?"

Iida blinks, but nods and scoots over a tad to make more room. Howler gets the memo and follows Izuku over there, careful to avoid the rest of his sleeping classmates.

He sits beside Iida and within moments, they're both laying down again, side by side, with Howler curled on Izuku's chest again. Izuku looks up at the ceiling for a time in the gentle silence between them, and he has no intention to break that. His body is utterly drained after what happened earlier, and sleep has already begun to drag him back under.

"Midoriya?"

Izuku hums to let him know he's listening.

"Is there... anything we can do for you? Is there something we can do that might, perhaps... lighten the load a little?"

Izuku hums again, this time in thought.

"... Ice cream."

He hears Iida shift in the dark. "Come again?"

"Tomorrow's Saturday, right?" Sleep is nagging in the forefront of his mind again and he can't chase it off. "We should all go get ice cream."

Iida falls silent for a long while, and Izuku smiles while reaching over in the dark and patting his shoulder.

"Night, Iida."

"Goodnight, Midoriya."

Izuku is asleep before Iida finishes saying his name.

The next time he opens his eyes, it's to someone shrieking "NO WAY REALLY?" followed by several loud, angry shushes. He cracks his eyes

open and pushes himself upright slowly. The blinds have been drawn back to let in the light, and he squints against it.

“Wassit?” he manages, voice fugged with sleep. Howler licks his face, and once Izuku’s eyes adjust, he’s able to fully look around the room.

“Oh *great!”* Sero says, throwing his hands in the air only to drop them to his sides just as quickly. “Great job, you woke him up!”

“I didn’t *mean* to!” Ashido amends, though it looks like the entire class is against her now. Everyone’s in the living room, packing up their blankets, and all eyes are on her. “Midori! You know I didn’t mean to wake you up, right?”

Izuku blinks at her tiredly. “Did you?”

The class *riots.*

Izuku looks across from him and somehow finds Shouto's eyes amidst his riling classmates.

"What are we doing?" Izuku asks, scratching Howler's head. "What's everyone so excited about?"

It's actually Iida who overhears and answers. "You said you wanted ice cream," he says simply. "So, I spoke to the teachers, and we're all venturing out to get some."

"There's this super cute parlor downtown!" Hagakure tells him as she bounces over. "All Might and Aizawa-sensei said they would take us there today!"

"If you want to," Kirishima speaks up. "We won't go if you don't feel up to it. There's always another day."

Izuku looks down at his hands for a long moment. His wrists are still bandaged; he's never looked at them, but he's willing to bet the electrocuting shackles brought a lot of permanent damage. More scars.

He lifts his head towards his friends again, and this time he smiles.

"It's fine. I would love to go out with all of you. Ice cream sounds really nice right about now."

They return his smile tenfold and go right back to bustling around, gathering blankets off the floor, going to their rooms to get dressed, the likes. Izuku goes to get ready himself, and he ends up grabbing his

teal hoodie from his closet. It has the words "I'm dead inside. And outside" on the front (a custom birthday gift from Mom), and he pauses in the bathroom to take a good long look at himself in the mirror.

His hair is still mostly white. That hasn't changed. But the dark rings beneath his eyes aren't as stark as before. He's not sure he'd notice them at all had he not known beforehand that they were there.

He takes in a long breath and lets it out before leaving. Howler is right at his heels, and Izuku decides, for today's outing, he'll leave the vest off. He wants Howler to be able to relax and have fun today. He definitely deserves it.

Izuku meets his classmates downstairs once they're all ready. Iida does a headcount, and once he's sure everyone is there who's supposed to be, he and the rest of Class 1-A, plus Howler, head outside.

Toshinori and Aizawa are outside already, waiting for them, and Izuku can't help but meet Toshinori's eyes the moment they disembark. Toshinori returns the gaze and soon after, he returns Izuku's smile too. There's been something of a rift between the two of them ever since Izuku shared his testimony; the first thing he wants to do is break that wall as soon as possible. There's no way they could possibly move on with such a block between them.

Howler bumps his nose against Izuku's hand, and Izuku snaps out of his daze and smiles. "I'm okay," he promises. "I'll be okay, don't worry."

Howler doesn't look convinced (or, about as unconvinced as a dog *can* look), but he doesn't bother him further, and Izuku loads into the bus with his classmates. Aizawa gets behind the steering wheel and Toshinori takes shotgun. Iida coordinates everyone's seating positions, and within moments they're speeding down the road, off U.A.'s campus and towards the ice cream parlor downtown.

Izuku's arranged seating position ends up being right beside Uraraka, who looks out the window at the buildings as they pass. Izuku opens his mouth to speak, but changes his mind at the last second. She notices.

"What's up?" Uraraka asks.

"Nothing really." Izuku shakes his head. "Just, y'know… thinking about some stuff, I guess."

She doesn't seem any less curious. "What kind of stuff?"

"I dunno, just…" Izuku pauses, trying to find the right way to put it. "It's just nice to be able to do this, y'know? It…" He twists his shoe against the floor of the bus for a moment. "It helps me feel like things are going back to normal."

Her eyes soften, but her smile is as bright as ever. "If that's the case," she says, poking him on the shoulder, "then I guess we'll just have to do it often. That's just how it'll have to be, I don't make the rules."

She's always had a contagious smile, and before long he finds himself smiling, too. Howler's tail thumps the floor at his feet.

"Thanks, Uraraka. I'm... I'm really glad to have you as my friend. You've been nothing but awesome and amazing even through everything, so... thanks for putting up with me."

She beams at him, brighter than ever. "Of course!" she says excitedly. "It's more than just putting up with you, Deku. You're one of my best friends. I'm just as glad to have met you."

He laughs loosely and rubs the back of his neck. "Thanks, Uraraka. That means a lot."

Her smile doesn't fade, and neither does his. It's not much later afterwards that they reach their destination and disembark. Howler stays right by his side the entire time, bouncing excitedly. Izuku is glad to be able to take Howler with them as just his pet. If the ice cream shop isn't animal-friendly, he'll just sit outside. Howler has supported him through all this, and he deserves a break just as much as the rest of them.

"Oh, I can't believe we're actually doing this!" Ashido gushes, bouncing around happily. She spins on her heel with drama to make a ballerina jealous and faces the group. "Let it be said that I will be judging you all heavily on your ice cream tastes!"

"Wait, seriously?" Sero says, wide-eyed.

"Of course!" Ashido says, like she could never imagine doing anything else, ever. "Tally ho, everyone!"

"All ice cream is valid," Satou says under his breath for only a few to hear.

Izuku nods. “It’s all dairy nice.”

“Oh for the love of *god,* Midoriya.”

Izuku cackles. Some join him, some make sure to keep their distance. Izuku has a presence in the class, and if they stick too close there’s no way they won’t end up joining him sooner or later.

“Alright,” Aizawa says, calling the class back to order, “here’s how we’ll do things. We’ll be sitting at the outside tables and taking people in two at a time to keep the mayhem to a minimum. And we will decide who goes first and what two people go together.”

The students don’t object. They head down the sidewalk for a little while, ignoring the looks they get by passersby. Izuku *swears* someone points out his white hair and identifies him as the “kid from Kamino,” but he pretends not to notice it.

It would seem someone *does* notice it, though, because Yaoyorozu slides further back in the group to flank him.

“What’s up?” Izuku asks.

She must’ve read his face, because she says in a quiet voice, “Don’t get hung up with the labels people put on you. They aren’t worth your time.”

Izuku blinks at her. She’s one of the people in the class that he’s never really interacted with much. But she *had* come for him, with the others, at Kamino, and that means something. And, like Iida, she probably feels responsible for the class, being vice-president and all.

Izuku smiles and nods. “Thanks. I’ve gotten pretty good at ignoring stuff like that, but, yeah. Thanks for… looking out for me, I guess?”

He doesn’t really know what to say, but she seems to understand where he’s coming from, because she smiles, nods, and turns to face the group again. They don’t speak to each other again, but Izuku finds it somewhat easier to tune out the voices of the passersby around them.

Howler gives his hand a happy little nudge, and that’s the breaking point. Izuku smiles.

The parlor is located in the city’s plaza by the mall, but not a part of the mall. There’s a courtyard outside, with loads of tables and

benches. Despite that it's a Saturday, there are little to no people in sight. It's a good thing.

Izuku leaves Howler with Shouto when it's his and Iida's turn. They go with Aizawa, away from the courtyard and into the shop. The inside is no busier than outside, and a big part of Izuku is thankful once again. Given his lack of presence, it can be difficult to get around large crowds.

"What are you getting, Midoriya?"

Izuku frowns, cradling his chin while he looks at the menu. "Lemme think…"

"Don't pick just based off a pun."

"I won't I won't, promise."
Iida raises a brow at him skeptically, but keeps it to himself. He orders a straight vanilla while Izuku gets a caramel drizzle and a dog-safe vanilla for Howler, and once they have their ice creams, they head outside with Aizawa to rejoin the rest of the class.

It isn't long before everyone has one. There's such a broad range of flavors and toppings between the large group, half of which Izuku didn't even know existed. Uraraka and Todoroki rejoin their table with green tea-flavored and sherbert respectively, and Tsuyu's actually looks like it has flies in it. Izuku doesn't ask.

"This is really nice," Uraraka says, smiling and scooping a bite onto her spoon. "I'm glad the teachers were so on-board with it."

Across from her, Iida nods. "As much as I like to spend the weekends studying," he says, "this is quite nice, also."

"You're kind of weird, Iida," Tsuyu says, her spoon still in her mouth.

Iida spins to face her. "What makes you say that?"

"No *normal person* does schoolwork on the weekdays!" says Ashido. She's sitting beside Tsuyu with an ice cream that looks to be about the same color as her skin. "I get doing homework on the weekend, but why would you keep studying?"

Iida looks personally offended, but he composes himself. "Well, Ashido," he says, straightening his glasses, "at least I *do* study."

“OOOOOOOO,” says Uraraka and Izuku at the same time.

“Didn’t know you had it in you, Iida,” says Tsuyu.

“Awww, you guys are no fair!” Ashido complains, crossing her arms over her chest. “I’m doing my best, okay!?”

“I could always help you if you need it,” Shouto says flatly. “I know you’ve been working with Yaoyorozu, but I don’t mind.”

“Well, that’s sweet of you,” Ashido says, still pouting, “but I’m gonna have to say no. You can be kind of boring sometimes, Todoroki.”

Shouto blinks. “Boring?”

“Yeah!” says Ashido. “Y’know, you’re just a typical straight-A student! You’re a great guy, believe me, but nothing exciting ever happens with you.”

“What do you think, Thermostat?” Izuku says, turning to him. “Are you just gonna take that?”

“I’m not sure,” Shouto says, and he looks back at Ashido. “What exactly do you want me to do?”

“I don’t know, something cool!”

“How cool would it be if I froze your feet?”

Uraraka *chokes* and has to turn away sharply to hide her coughs and laughs. “O-Oh my *gosh,”* she manages, barely able to get the words out. “I can’t tell if you’re threatening her or trying to make a joke.”

Izuku opens his mouth.

“Midoriya.” Iida points his spoon at him. “Don’t you dare.”

“What?” Izuku questions, frowning. “Why do you guys always assume I’m gonna make a wisecrack or something?”

Tsuyu takes a spoonful of ice cream. “Because that’s kind of what you do, Izuku-chan.”

“... Fair enough.”

“Okay,” says Shouto, looking around, “does *anyone* care that Ashido called me boring.”

“I didn’t say you’re boring *all* the time, I just said you don’t do a lot of exciting things!”

“What *kind* of exciting things would I *do?”*

“I don’t know, something daring!”

“Like *what?”*

“Heck, I dunno, go put salt on your ice cream or something! Do something interesting!”

Shouto stares at her for a long, hard moment.

And then he gets to his feet, grabs his bowl, and is gone.

“WAIT IS HE FOR REAL? I WAS *KIDDING!”*

“You can’t kid around Shouto,” Izuku says, shaking his head. “And you really shouldn’t dare him, either.”

Shouto does, in fact, return with salted ice cream. He makes eye contact and maintains it as he puts his bowl on the table, takes a seat, and takes a bite. Ashido looks terrified.

“You two are just *scheming* now!” Ashido accuses, looking just about ready to vault herself out of the bench. “I can’t believe you actually *agreed,* Todoroki! Has Midori-chan really been that bad of an influence on you?”

Shouto’s face doesn’t change. “It doesn’t taste bad.”

“That’s not the *point!”*

“You sound pretty upset,” Izuku says, resting his elbows on the table and resting his chin on his knuckles. “One might even say that you’re…” He straightens a pair of make-believe sunglasses, “in *salt* ed.”

“MIDORI-CHAAAAAN.”

“No,” Shouto says, shaking his head, “I think she’s salty.”

“Ayyyy!” Izuku says, snapping gun-fingers at him.

Shouto gives him what is probably the most unenthusiastic gun-finger he could ever ask for. “Ay.”

“Schemers!”

They fist-bump.

“Stoooop!”

“You lot certainly sound lively,” says Toshinori, and Izuku and the others lift their heads as he makes their way over. He pats Howler on the head when the dog moves to greet him. “Mind if I sit with you?”

“Oh, of course!” says Iida, already scooting over to make room. “Ashido, Tsuyu, move over some.”

The two oblige, and Toshinori takes a seat beside Iida, across from Uraraka, Izuku, and Shouto. On the ground under the table, Howler licks his wrapper clean.

“Iida, Todoroki and Midori-chan are ganging up on me,” Ashido whines, dropping her head onto the table. “I don’t even know why I’m sitting with you guys.”

“Actually, this *really* isn’t bad,” Shouto says, stirring his ice cream again. “You should all try it.”

“I would encourage you to not abuse your daily sodium intake!” Iida interjects, punctuating it with a swipe of his hand. “Why in the name of *sanity* would you put salt on your ice cream?”

“It’s not bad.”

“That wasn’t the *question.”*

Izuku meets Toshinori’s eyes from across the table, and when Izuku smiles, Toshinori returns it wholeheartedly. It’s such a small moment, but Izuku can feel the tension in his chest melt away like ice. There isn’t a rift between them. There probably never *was* one. They’ll be okay.

“Can I sit with you?”

Toshinori turns toward Izuku, standing in the aisle next to Toshinori’s seat on the bus. There’s an empty spot beside him.

“Oh, certainly, my boy,” Toshinori says, scooting over so Izuku doesn’t have to climb over him. Izuku smiles and sits down beside him with a quiet thank you. Howler settles down on the floorboards beneath

them.

“Everyone in?” Aizawa calls from the passenger seat.

“Everyone is accounted for!” comes Iida’s booming voice a couple rows back. Aizawa gives a nod to the driver, and they’re zooming down the road in no time at all.

A silence falls between them even as the rest of the students laugh and talk behind them. Toshinori looks down at his hands, folded in his lap, and wonders if maybe he should say something. There’s nothing uncomfortable about the silence between them. There’s never been anything uncomfortable between him and Izuku. He doesn’t understand why he’s hesitating.

“Is something wrong?” Izuku asks, watching him. His eyes are drawn, and he looks exhausted and worried.

“Ah, no,” Toshinori promises, shaking his head. “Just thinking is all.”

Izuku turns away, looking down at his hands. “You know I’ll be okay, right?”

Toshinori’s head whips around, and he doesn’t know how or why Izuku has always been able to read him so well. After a moment to gather himself, Toshinori smiles gently.

“I know, kiddo.” He can’t tell who exactly he’s saying it to, or whether it’s meant to reassure Izuku, or reassure himself. “I know.”

“So.” Izuku scoots a little closer so he can lean over and rest his head on Toshinori’s shoulder. “Try not to worry so much about me anymore. I’ll be okay.”

Toshinori inhales deeply, and a part of him knows that he’ll never really *stop* worrying about this boy, but… at the very least, he can try to hold his head up high for his sake.

He brings an arm around Izuku’s shoulders and draws him closer. “That’s a hard promise to make, my boy, but… I’ll do my best.”

Izuku smiles gently, and Toshinori can’t help but return the gesture.

Getting Howler an ice cream turned out to be one of Izuku’s… well, not *bad* ideas, but *not optimal* ideas, because from the second they walked into the dormitory to the second the sun went down, the dog

was ten times more hyper than any toddler Izuku had ever seen.

It was alright, though. His friends played tug-of-war with one of his ropes, and while they let Howler *win,* it definitely helped burn off some of that energy. And not just Howler's energy, but the students' energy, too. After having such a bright day follow such a horrific incident, they're all a little frazzled.

"Hey," Sero says, snapping his fingers, "we should all get together and play a game!"

Despite her claim of being exhausted moments ago, Ashido shoots upright, eyes wide and hands clutching the edge of the couch. "A GAME!" she repeats loudly, then springs to her feet with a wild grin. "That sounds like a great idea!"

"We haven't eaten dinner yet," says Iida, like they should care a great deal about that. No one really seems to.

Izuku slides up to him and bumps their shoulders together. "C'mon, Iida, we can eat dinner afterwards. A couple games won't hurt."

Iida frowns at him, but sighs heavily and shakes his head. "Alright, I'll give," he says, though he doesn't seem happy about it.

It doesn't take long at all for the rest of them to agree to it and gather in a circle on the floor of the common room. Howler sits by Izuku's side, and Kouda reaches across and pats him on the head every now and then. Even Bakugou has joined them, sitting in between Kirishima and Kaminari, who are on the side farthest from Izuku for no specific reason.

"Okay," Hagakure says, rocking herself back and forth (probably, it's hard to tell since it's just her clothes), "what should we play?"

"Truth or dare?" Sero offers.

Tsuyu shakes her head. "Too extreme," she says. "In this group, I think that would be a very bad idea."

"How about a card game or something?" suggests Kaminari, looking to Yaoyorozu.

"That *would* work," Yaoyorozu says, tapping a finger to her chin, "but with a group of this size, you'd need at *least* ten decks. I feel like that'd get disorganized very quickly."

“How about Mafia?” says Uraraka, waving a hand in the air. “I used to play it with my friends in middle school, it’s pretty fun!”

“I feel like that’s a better game for a slightly smaller group,” says Jirou. “We’d probably have to split into two separate teams if we wanted to go with that.”

“Ah, good point…” Uraraka taps her chin. “Huh. This is tricky. Does anyone else have any suggestions?”

A couple other titles get thrown around. A couple board games are suggested, but the group is simply too big for that to be a viable option. Very few board games are suited for a group of their size, and besides, there aren’t many people in the group who actually brought bored games from home.

“What about you, Shouto?” Izuku asks at length, bumping his knee against Shouto’s. “Do you have any games you wanna play?”

All eyes go to him. Shouto looks down thoughtfully, cradling his chin in a hand. Eventually, he lifts his head towards the rest of the group.

“Hide and seek,” he says.

A silence falls.

And then Aoyama cheers, “One two three *not it!”*

A chorus of *“not it!”* s chorus from the group until Kaminari is left as the last one to speak up. He *sighs,* but no one else is daunted by it.

“Count to twenty!” says Yaoyorozu. “We’ll set a couple ground rules here and now: no running, no tackling, Quirk use is fine as long as it doesn’t cause harm to you, others, or the building, everyone must stay out of their personal dormitory, and the ‘It’ person has fifteen minutes to find everyone before we declare winner.”

Tokoyami raises his hand. “Can I make a suggestion?”

Yaoyorozu nods. “Of course.”

“Let’s shut all the windows and turn out all the lights.”

Izuku snaps his fingers. “Revelry in the dark.”

Tokoyami nods solemnly. “Revelry in the dark.”

“As long as everyone is responsible,” chimes in Iida with a wide swipe of his hand, “then I have no objections! Kaminari, you can start counting as soon as all the lights go out.”

Kaminari gives him a thumbs-up. Izuku turns to Howler. “You wanna hide with me, buddy?”

Howler barks, Izuku laughs, and he and the others head around the room, flicking off light switches and turning off lamps. Howler does his part, bouncing against the wall and bopping light switches with his nose. Once darkness completely engulfs the dorm, Kaminari starts counting, and everyone scrambles to hide.

Kaminari walks down the hall all by himself. He’d been allowed one finger light considering he’s ‘It’ this round, but it’s hardly enough light for him to see where he’s going, let alone actually *find* anyone.

He swallows thickly and keeps moving onwards.

“G-Guys listen,” he stammers, breath hitching, “I know it’s like half the fun of playing in the dark but please don’t jump out and scare me, I’m gonna pull a Midoriya and astral project if you do—”

“BLAGH!”

“Wow, did you guys hear that scream?” whispers Ochako, tucked away in a cramped hall closet with Yaoyorozu and Jirou.

Jirou nods. “Sounds like another one of the girls got scared. Hopefully they aren’t as close to us as they sound.”

Kirishima *cackles,* and Kaminari pants and gasps and fights for his breath. He points the flashlight accusingly into Kirishima’s laughing face. “That *wasn’t funny!”*

“You screamed so loud you sounded like *mic feedback,”* Kirishima wheezes, hardly able to contain himself. “I wish I had a flashlight just so I could see that *look on your face…”*

“You could’ve *killed me,* you *jerk!”* Kaminari snaps. Kirishima still hasn’t stopped laughing, and that doesn’t change.

“... Okay. Okay *look at that* and tell me *why the heck that’s fair.”*

“I mean,” says Kirishima, rubbing the back of his neck, “Yaoyorozu *did* say that Quirk-use was totally allowed, y’know?”

“But,” Kaminari gestures helplessly, “how are we gonna *find him* if he’s a freaking *ghost?”*

Before them on the floor in the hall is Izuku’s empty body with Howler curled up beside him, looking far too pleased with himself.

“... Okay, hang on.” Kirishima whips out his phone, squinting against the light. “Okay, let’s try something…”

“What is it?” Kaminari intones, shoulders slumped. “It’s not gonna work, dude, there’s no way you can track him.”

“But he’s a strong spirit, right? Which means…” Kirishima must find what he’s looking for, because he flips around the phone for Kaminari to see. Kaminari squints against the light for a moment, too, but when his eyes adjust, he sees that Kirishima has pulled up his phone filters. Kaminari’s image in the screen has a pair of dog ears.

“You seriously think we could *pick up* Midoriya on that thing?” he asks, frowning.

Kirishima grins. “You could try!” he says. “Anything’s worth a shot, don’t you think?”

At this point, roughly five minutes in and no closer to finding anyone else, Kaminari *is* desperate enough to try. He takes Kirishima’s phone from him and leads the way down the corridor.

They find Sero next pretty easily. He’d taped himself to one of the ceiling fans in the common room and crossed his fingers that they wouldn’t look up. They find Tsuyu doing a similar thing, only she’s in the kitchen on top of the refrigerator. There’s still several kinds of duct tape plastered over the digital clock of the microwave. They find Satou hiding behind the couch as well as he can considering his bulking figure, and Todoroki somehow managed to build an ice perch for himself in the highest corner of the room. Still many more classmates to find and not nearly enough time with which to do that.

“Okay okay okay, we have to be close to finding Midoriya unless he’s just screwing with us and hiding in the wall,” says Kaminari, leading the group onwards. “Which, honestly that’s probably the most Midoriya thing he could do right now so I wouldn’t be surprised.”

“Watch him scare us or something,” says Sero, nudging Kaminari on the arm. “You have the *highest pitched scream* I’ve ever heard, dude, and some part of me wants to both tape your mouth shut, and hear it again.”

Kaminari *sighs.* “Jerks,” he mumbles, shaking his head. “Anyway, we’ve gotta find Midoriya sooner or later. He’s kind of the dude to look out for in games like this—OH HOLY CRAP THE FILTER TURNED ON! MIDORIYA! WE KNOW YOU’RE THERE! SHOW YOURSELF!”

Izuku seems to materialize out of the thin air in front of them, his entire figure glowing bright as day, and through the filter on Kirishima’s phone, there’s a pair of dog ears on his head.

“Smart thing using the filter,” Izuku says, grinning. “I was hoping you’d give up.”

Unfortunately, there’s not much more to be done; Kaminari’s time is up shortly thereafter, and the first person to be found—in this case, Kirishima—takes his place as ‘It.’ Everyone scrambles to hide, and this time, Izuku takes Howler (and his body) with him.

They don’t play a ton of rounds. Everyone is still worn out from the day before and today’s endeavor, and after a couple more goes and a couple more scares, everyone is just about ready to turn in for the night. Izuku changes into one of his favorite t-shirts (one with yet another ghost pun on the front) and heads downstairs to take Howler out to use the bathroom before heading to bed.

Except when he arrives, he finds his classmates gathered in the common room, ready for bed, spreading blankets and pillows all around the floor again.

“What are you guys doing?” Izuku asks, making his way over. Howler trots right by his side and sits when Izuku draws closer. “Don’t you wanna sleep in your own rooms?”

“We thought it’d be fun if we all slept down here together,” says Shouto, a blanket tucked against his chest with both arms. “Plus, Iida thought it might be a good idea to keep an eye on you for another day or two just in case.”

“I’m sure I’ll be fine,” Izuku says, but it kind of feels like a question. Or some kind of false reassurance he’s giving himself. Judging by their

faces, his classmates don't buy it and honestly, neither can he. He sighs. "... Or, we can just. Sleep down here again tonight."

This satisfies them, and Izuku lets Howler outside and grabs his blankets and pillows from his room. After all that's happened, he really doesn't mind this arrangement one bit.

Soon enough, this finds them all on the floor on their blankets and pillows, staring up at the ceiling. Izuku is in between Uraraka and Iida with Howler flopped over his chest, snoring contentedly.

"We should put something on the ceiling," says Kaminari, and in the darkness, Izuku sees his arm raise to point upwards. "Some star stickers or glow-in-the-dark paint or something."

"Are you saying it's going to be a regular habit of ours to sleep on the floor?" Tsuyu asks, though it's poised as more of a statement than a question.

"I'm just saying it'd be cool!" Kaminari defends, a smile in his voice. "Besides, who's to say that'd be so bad? I don't really mind sleeping down here on the floor as long as we don't have school the next day."

Izuku can't help but smile. "I don't mind, either," he agrees, nodding. His fingers stroke through Howler's fur gently and rhythmically. "Actually, that might be kind of fun."

"I don't got a problem with it," says Kirishima across from him, "but honestly Midoriya you've spent a good half of your life lying on the cold hard ground so I'm not sure you deserve a say in this."

Izuku snorts. "Rude."

"As long as we clean up afterwards," says Yaoyorozu before the banter can go on, "then I don't have any objections to us sleeping down here more often. Iida?"

"No objections to speak of granted everything is done in an orderly manner," says Iida. A couple cheers go up from the group, but are quickly stomped down by Bakugou, who snaps that he'd been trying to sleep. After that, no one feels like getting into a fight with him and settle down for the night.

"... Hey," says Hagakure suddenly, voice quiet but loud enough for all to hear, "do you guys ever, like… think about what we'll be doing

once we graduate? Like, right now we're here, and we can sleep downstairs together and play hide and go seek and go out for ice cream, but… five years from now, where do you guys think you'll be?"

"I mean, I was kinda hoping I'd be able to travel more," comes Sero's voice. "I could be one of those heroes who doesn't really stay in one place for very long, y'know? Doesn't really have a specific place to call home, always stays on the move, never settles down—"

"Usually," says Tsuyu, "people like that are called 'hobos.'"

Sero hurls a pillow at her. *"You know what I mean!"*

"It is rather interesting to think about," says Shouji. Izuku hadn't really expected him to speak up, since he's usually one of the quieter ones. "Honestly, if we can all make it through school alive and someday become heroes, I'm not sure it matters what we're doing. So long as we make it."

"Yeah, I kinda feel like that, too," says Uraraka, nodding. "But, if we're talking smaller things… then, I really wanna get my parents a mansion. Someday. Or, at least a house that's worth their while. They've done so much for me and they've worked so hard their whole lives. It'd be awesome if I could just… let them spend the rest of it in luxury."

"I guess just becoming a hero that people could look up to is all I want to be," Shouto speaks up, voice soft but confident. "I never really had anyone to look up to when I was young, and if I can be that for some other little kid, then I want to."

"I want to make my brother proud," Iida says, "and become the kind of hero who does whatever they can for the good of the people."

"You guys are so *freaking noble,"* Kirishima weeps, voice thick. He sniffs, and Izuku can't tell whether he's trying to be dramatic, or if it really is just like that. "For me, I just wanna be a hero who doesn't back down from anything. To be someone who isn't afraid to do whatever it takes to save people."

"What about you, Midoriya?" Jirou pokes his foot with her toe. "Where do you wanna be in five years?"

Izuku pauses for a moment, humming under his breath.

“I mean, nothing immediately comes to mind,” he says, stroking Howler’s fur. “I guess I just… never really thought about it. I always knew I wanted to be a hero, but I never had a very clear picture of the future.”

“Yeah, I getcha,” says Kaminari, “but, I mean… if you *had* to have a picture, what would it be? What do you *want* your future to look like?”

“And we’re talking small details,” says Ashido. *“Specifics.* Which means you can’t just generalize it with some heroic stuff or something.”

Izuku thinks about this for a long, silent while. Then, even though his friends can’t see it in the darkness, he smiles.

“... I guess being able to show people that it doesn’t matter what kind of Quirk you have would be pretty cool,” he says. “I grew up my whole life thinking I was some kind of monster. So I guess if I was able to show people that you can still be a hero with a Quirk you aren’t exactly proud of… that’d make me pretty happy. I really want to just be able to help out all the people I can, but if we’re talking small things, then… yeah. That’d be enough.”

The conversation goes on for another solid hour. Long enough for everyone to talk about their hopes, their dreams, their setbacks, and their determination to plow those setbacks into grounds with which to move forward. Izuku doesn’t remember closing his eyes, but he drops into sleep peacefully, surrounded by the voices of these friends who have become like family.

He doesn’t have a single nightmare. Not a single flashback. Not a single death sequence. For what feels like the first night in a very long time, he *sleeps.*

The following week finds Izuku standing by the shrine he'd built what seems so very long ago, standing just as simply as it'd been the day he constructed it. It's surrounded by flowers and candles of people leaving things not only for the ghosts at Kamino, but also for the loved ones they'd lost and will never forget.

"... Well. I made it."

The shrine doesn't answer, but it doesn't need to. Izuku smiles, glances down at Howler, then lifts his head again.

"Honestly, I didn't think it was possible," Izuku says, shaking his head. "I thought things were just gonna go downhill from Kamino, but… everything's been pretty good lately. I started talking to a therapist. Kaminari and I are still getting along. It's…" He looks down, this time at his hands. "It's taking a lot longer than I'd hoped, but… we're making progress. We'll get there someday."

Howler nudges him. Izuku pets his head as both a comfort to the dog and to himself.

"... Thanks for everything," Izuku says, and even though he's smiling, his eyes sting just a little. "I know I've already said it once before, but… yeah. Thanks for all the encouragements and thanks for everything you did. I know you've found your peace and all, and… I just wanted to let you know that I think I've finally found mine, too."

There's no response, but some part of him can still feel them. Not physically, but through memories, through encouraging words, through jeers and laughs and precious, precious moments. They're gone, and they aren't coming back, but he'll never forget them. Never in a million years.

"Thought I might find you here."
Izuku turns and glances over his shoulder at Shouto as he makes his way up the hillside. Izuku smiles gently, nods, and turns back to the shrine and the ocean. He doesn't think the sunset has ever looked more beautiful.

Shouto steps up beside him and follows his gaze. For a while, there's a calm, serene silence between them, broken only by waves as they crash up against the stones below the cliff.

At long last, Shouto speaks. "... This semester has been… pretty wild."

Izuku exhales sharply. *"Pretty* wild?"

"Okay no, it's been absolutely insane."

"That's more like it," Izuku says, still smiling. "Although, it's brought a lot of good things, too. I think it was worth it."

"Really?" Shouto turns to him this time, and Izuku meets his eyes. He looks startled. "Even after…" His eyes shoot towards Izuku's wrists just long enough to be noticeable; Izuku still keeps them bandaged, just in case. "You know."

"Well, yeah," Izuku says, shaking his head. "I mean, yeah, it sucks, and I'm pretty sure it's *still* gonna suck until I… *get over it,* someday, I guess, but. Like I said. A lot of good came out of everything, too. We took down All For One, the ex-holders got the chance to find *their* peace… and we're alive, too. I don't know about you, Thermostat, but I'm excited about what the future holds."

"Really?" Shouto says.

Izuku nods. "Even if it's even crazier than everything we've been through so far."

Shouto turns away again to watch the horizon for a while longer. Eventually, Izuku sees him smile.

"... I guess I'm excited, too. Spearmint."

"Gah." Izuku shoves him playfully, and Shouto laughs. "Seriously though, you can't really call me that anymore."

"Wintermint."

"Wintermint—" Izuku laughs, too, but shakes his head. "Y'know what, actually? That works."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, definitely. I mean." He runs a hand through his hair, mostly white with bits of green on the tips. "Sure, this sucked, but y'know, we're past that, now. It doesn't bother me."

Shouto studies his face, and when he finds no lie, he smiles. "Well, only if you're sure—oh hang on a second."

He steps forward until he can reach out and thread his fingers through

Izuku's hair, brows knitted together. Izuku frowns.

"What is it?"

Shouto doesn't answer, but a moment later, he steps back and lowers his hand back to his side. "Your hair, Izuku."

"Yes, it's white."

"No, I mean—the green. It's growing back."

"Wait, *really?"* Izuku runs his hand through his hair again, as though he could feel the colors. "Are you serious?"

Shouto nods. "It's just a bit at the roots for now," he says, "but, it would seem you'll be Spearmint again soon enough, Izuku."

The extent of what this *really means* doesn't hit him for another long second, but when it *does,* his eyes burn and his face is split with a wide, bright smile.

"What do you know," he says, looking down at his hand and shaking his head. "Guess the future really *does* show promise, doesn't it?"

Shouto returns the smile, and Izuku thinks it's the brightest, most honest thing he's ever seen. "In more ways than one."

Chapter End Notes

> And with that, dear readers, Dis(associate) draws to a close. Thank you for everything.
>
> I'll see you at the epilogue.

End Notes

Find me on tumblr! :D <3

Also, a huge thanks to my ever-patient beta reader, ChiwiTheKiwi. Thanks for putting up with me!!

Works inspired by this one

What's Past Is Prologue by orphan_account

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!